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The Walker Art Center website : a study of cultural administration

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THE WALKER ART CENTER WEBSITE:
A STUDY OF CULTURAL ADMINISTRATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

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ABSTRACT

On December 1, 2011, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, launched a new website that presented a completely new format for its museum's online presence and a new strategy for museums in general. The Walker's new site adopts an online journalistic platform for its homepage, which it dubbed its "front page." It functions as an online arts magazine showcasing the museum's activities, exhibitions, informational resources and collections material, but also placed in a wider field of related cultural material aggregated from other online sources. Indeed, the new website is distinct from any previous museum website on these two points: one, it focuses on producing a wide variety of authored information through its articles and several blogs as its main driver of procuring online attention, and, two, it presents information aggregated from other sources outside of the Walker. These methods are what it deems its editorial focus. Yet, it also means pulling the wider field of arts activity into direct contact with its own institution and its homepage prominently displays media related to their interests. Though similar online strategies are nothing new, in general, arts critics and media reviews have lauded the museum's use of these methods as novel. Its homepage prominently displays its place in a wider cultural field. Though it may be unusual for a museum website, both the Walker's production of editorialized content and its online engagement within the larger arts sphere through aggregated content actually bolster the museum's ongoing institutional aims and functions. Moreover, while it appears to be an informative website that provides access to different types or sources of information, the Walker Art Center's website ultimately functions to expand the museum's institutional power as it attempts to exert more control in the arts world and over its audience.

INTRODUCTION

On December 1, 2011, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, launched a new website that presented a completely new format for its museum's online presence and a new strategy for museums in general. The Walker's new site adopts an online journalistic platform for its homepage, which it dubbed its "front page." It functions as an online arts magazine showcasing the museum's activities, exhibitions, informational resources and collections material, but also placed in a wider field of related cultural material aggregated from other online sources. Indeed, the new website is distinct from previous museum website on these two points: one, it focuses on producing a wide variety of authored information through its articles and several blogs as its main driver of procuring online attention, and, two, it presents information aggregated from other sources outside of the Walker. These methods are what it deems its editorial focus. Yet, it also means pulling the wider field of arts activity into direct contact with its own institution, and its new homepage prominently displays media related to their interests. Though similar online strategies are nothing new, in general, arts critics and media reviews have praised the museum's use of these strategies on its website as innovative. Though it may be unusual for a museum website, both the Walker's production of editorialized content and its online engagement within the larger arts sphere through aggregated content actually bolster the museum's ongoing institutional aims and functions. Moreover, while it appears to be an informative website that provides access to different types or sources of information, the Walker Art Center's website ultimately functions to expand the museum's institutional power as it attempts to exert more control in the arts world and over its audience.

In a culture that embraces the new, especially when it comes to technological innovation, the Walker's website has been lauded as a "game changer" and the Walker has welcomed the

praise.¹ The website has been recognized by other museums and by the tech industry. It won two web awards at the 2012 Museums and the Web conference for “Most Innovative” and “Best Overall” categories. Likewise, it was nominated for a Webby Award by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences (IADAS). Both Museums and the Web and IADAS support the efforts of museums and cultural industries to develop and implement web technology. The Walker has also been rewarded by its expanded online presence and increased audiences. This cultural expansion depended on networked technologies and reflected the changing nature of how institutions relate to their audiences. The conditions that brought about these results, however, do not necessarily benefit society or art. The website’s accolades and reviews obscure or only perfunctorily describe its institutional functions and mask many of its political implications, especially for the role of museums in online culture.

While there is much interest in the ontology of the digital image and the nature of digital representation, this examination into online culture instead focuses on the nature of institutional practice in a networked culture. This study of the Walker website addresses its online presence as a form of cultural production and examines its affects on the museum’s institutional structure, its treatment of art, and its audience.

Section one provides a general background. It describes the Walker Art Center’s new website within the wider context of the museum field and the Walker’s changing relationship

¹ Tyler Green, “Why the Walker’s new website is a big deal,” *Modern Art Notes* (blog), Blouin ArtInfo online, December 5, 2011, <http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2011/12/why-the-walkers-new-website-is-a-big-deal/>; Paul Schmelzer, “‘Gamechanger’: Early reviews of the new Walker website,” *Media Lab* (blog), Walker Art Center website, December 5, 2011, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2011/12/05/reviews-of-the-new-walker-art-center-website/>; and Olga Viso, “Year in Review: Letter from the Executive Director,” Walker Art Center website (Walker Art Center Annual Report 2011-2012), December 17, 2012, <http://www.walkerart.org/2011-2012-annual-report>. Green used the phrase “game changer” and Walker’s staff has been quick to point this out. Several other reviews share views in this vein including Alexis C. Madrigal, “Museum as Node: What to Love About the Walker Art Center’s New Website,” *The Atlantic* online, December 5, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/12/museum-as-node-what-to-love-about-the-walker-art-centers-new-website/249495/>.

with technology. Museums are embracing the “intangibles” of technology. Additionally, the Walker has been particularly invested in using technologies and has integrated them deeper into its mission and operations. This virtual network also connects to the Walker’s physical or “real world” counterpart. In this regard, a museum’s collection is one of its most important resources. The Walker’s acquisition of objects related to Merce Cunningham’s work demonstrates how the collection generates material for the website. In response, the website manifests the Walker’s wider institutional activities and programs through its online content, its design, and in other elements that tie the website to the physical space.

Section two details the appearance and design of the new website and its various parts. Moreover, it addresses the Walker website’s overall organization and its strategic use of different types of informative materials, including stories, articles, blogs, and videos. The explicit aim of the site is to make visible the Walker’s role as cultural producer in the field of contemporary art. The homepage also acts as like a newspaper’s “front page” to the larger online *Walker Magazine*. Though it uses a journalistic format, it does not aim to be objective, but to provide multiple subjective views. This is especially evident with its blogs. Using aggregated material, the Walker also affirms its institutional associations and authority. Moreover, the Walker’s expanded online institutional presence is driven by its desire to reach to a larger audience, towards whom it directs its cultural products. Its online space represents its controlled territories of knowledge.

The Walker’s online platform is embedded in the Internet’s network structures. This structure is important to understanding the spatial nature of the Internet and is covered in Section three. Importantly, in contrast to populist images of the Web as uncontrolled, liberated wide open spaces out in the ether, Internet architecture is, in fact, materially real and highly structured.

The Walker's online structure follows an institutional model that reveals its specific position in Internet space and politics. The Walker refers to its new online institutional model as an "Idea Hub" or "hub" for short. This institutional model depends on gathering up as many informational contacts into your online network as possible. The website's links also support its expanded network. This model is based on decentralized control in the wider distributed networks of the Internet. While the Walker reinforces an image of its idea hub and, by extension itself, as a kind of informative cultural service, its new online model acts to exercise control in the cultural field and to expand its own institutional territories. To this end, its online content is revealed to be an element of the Internet architecture. The expansion of its digital content and audiences actually entails an expansion of the institution's networked space.

Section four treats the new online space of the website as a special heterotopic cultural space for the museum and for society at large. A heterotopia is a specialized space that stands apart from other social spaces. This organized, heterotopic space is not only separate from other spaces, but it also relates back to wider society and the traditional spaces of museums, as exemplified by museum buildings. The Walker's website's expanded network structure becomes a vision of how space relates to the control of subjects in society. The model of the modern museum also focuses the attention of its visitors, to seemingly separate them from the wider sphere of life. The website, likewise, replicates both a boundary separating it audience from the rest of society and it makes visible particular online behaviors. Pointedly, the strength of the Walker's online institutional space is bound up with its ability to map and to incorporate the audience into its institutional structure. The online space of the Walker is a model of institutional power over the cultural field and body politic. This new relationship with the public accompanies wider cultural shifts in the Internet age that are enhanced by social media.

The Walker's website also demonstrates the attention given to museums' audiences and the efforts to be "audience-driven." Seeking online audiences, the museum then uses its online visitors to build its institutional network and increase its cultural influence. Furthermore, particularly potent is the tension between the explicitly visible boundaries of the museum space, on one hand, and, on the other, the masked mechanisms of institutional structures that is only heightened through their new online format. The networked Internet system provides the Walker with a new model of space and institutional power over its audiences. Through expanding and centralizing cultural territories, the Walker's online presence manages both its cultural field and a public rendered controllable by its own self-occupied interests.

SECTION 1: A MUSEUM IN THE DIGITAL TURN

The Walker: A Museum “Of Our Times”

Museums are well known for their traditional roles as collection caretakers and purveyors of exhibitions. Yet, overtime the professional definition of museums has periodically changed. The International Council of Museums, better known as ICOM, can attest to this and provides a record of the museum community’s shifting and expanding roles, since ICOM’s start in 1946. The latest recognized change comes fifty years after museums began using computers to improve collection records and management systems, and then later, to enhance exhibition displays and interpretive efforts.² In 2007, ICOM significantly updated its official definition of a museum ratified at its twenty-first General Conference. As the ICOM Statutes now states:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits *the tangible and intangible heritage* of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.³

In comparison to previous iterations, the new definition notably contains the added phrase “the tangible and intangible heritage” and marks the removal of the words “material evidence” that the new wording replaces. Therefore, in addition to the maintenance and display of collections (i.e. “tangible” heritage), museums must now contend with another concern that is considered essential to their expanded institutional purposes: “intangible heritage.” Intangible heritage includes a wide set of experiential or temporally based cultural phenomenon, such as performance art, as well as those resulting from digital technologies such as digital

² Ross Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 48. Parry dates 1963 as the start of an organized effort by staff at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC for computer automation within the museum. Then in 1965, the Library of Congress began the machine-readable catalogue project (MARC) that was later adopted by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History in 1967.

³ “Museum Definition,” ICOM Website, accessed March 11, 2013, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/> (emphasis added). Notably, ICOM’s definition applies to an international membership association of nearly 30,000 museums.

documentation, digital works, and other aspects of cultural heritage, of which websites must surely be considered.

The Walker Art Center, a respected arts institution established in 1927, exemplifies the larger museum field's interest in technology and keeps up with the new roles of museums.

According to its mission statement, the Walker Art Center describes itself as:

a catalyst for the creative expression of artists and the active engagement of audiences. Focusing on the visual, performing, and media arts *of our time*, the Walker takes a global, multidisciplinary, and diverse approach to the creation, presentation, interpretation, collection, and preservation of art. Walker programs examine the questions that shape and inspire us as individuals, cultures, and communities.⁴

This definition meets all the current criteria in the ICOM definition for a museum.

As an arts institution dedicated to modern and contemporary art, though, the Walker Art Center's purposefully retains the nominal title "center" instead of "museum." The word "museum" often portrays an institution focused on the preservation of what is already past, while the Walker focuses on the arts "of our time." Other modern and contemporary art museums share this emphasis on what is current. In all respects, the Walker Art Center operates as a museum, even without the designation, and is referred to in this regard. In keeping with the new definition of a museum, the Walker also has many years of experience with media arts and other intangibles such as performance art. It has established a reputation within the museum community as being an advocate for a full range of contemporary art media and for showcasing new media programs and platforms run by technologically skilled and experienced in-house staff. Fittingly, it has a particularly positive attitude towards integrating technologies into its museum functions.

⁴ "Mission and History," Walker Art Center Website, accessed February 18, 2013. <http://www.walkerart.org/about/mission-history>, (emphasis added).

The Walker's New Media Initiatives Department started in 1996, only a few years after Tim Berners-Lee introduced the World-Wide-Web to the general public in the early 1990s. New Media Initiatives quickly developed a range of projects that placed them at the fore of cultural institutions working with digital technologies and the Internet. Under its first director and curator, Steve Dietz, the department initially championed online art and a curatorial approach to new media. The Walker acquired the digital art platform äda'web for its collection and the New Media Initiatives department created *Gallery 9*, an online gallery and exhibition space specializing in Internet Art. Active from 1997 to 2003, *Gallery 9* exhibited over a hundred artists and became one of a select group of established venues that supported and commissioned new media art. After *Gallery 9* closed, the Walker entombed its body of work in an online archive at gallery9.walkerart.org, essentially tucked away from the main action of the website. The Walker also partnered with outside organizations to create two other websites, both service-oriented and still active: ArtsConnectEd and mnartists.org. ArtsConnectEd is an arts database and education resource, while mnartist.org helps local Minnesota artists. New Media Initiatives also served the Walker's other departments and produced various technological displays and interactive elements for exhibitions and programs within its physical spaces. Over the last decade, it has focused more on technological services or features to attract and engage audiences. Social media and online networking has only heightened this audience orientated behavior.

In 2009, the Walker formed its Audience Engagement and Communications division (AEC). The AEC reorganized the institution's departments combining design, new media, education, and marketing. In this way, design and new media work in tandem to serve the Walker's combined educational and marketing goals. In keeping with the museum's larger institutional aims and following its reputation for technological innovation, the AEC also

developed the Walker's current website launched in December 2011. The museum's previous website design was six years old and, while it added new features to the site over the years, the overall format remained the same. The new site took an entirely different approach reflecting its dual educational and marketing purposes.

Just as combining education, marketing, and new media within the AEC helps the Walker manage its institutional goals across various projects, the Walker's overall digital strategies also relate closely to its larger museum strategies.⁵ To that end, it is important to reflect upon these institutional contexts before addressing the website itself. Contrary to populist statements that the world is becoming more "virtual," – that is, taken over by technology – the real, rather, is embedding its use of the virtual into our experience of reality.⁶ People readily used technological communications in their everyday social interactions, to conduct work, to participate politically, and to construct their social order. Moreover, technology does not exist autonomously from, or prior to, politics.⁷ Politics, military, and corporate interests have long developed technological forms to suit their aims.⁸ Likewise, while technology is affecting museums, museums also are actively adapting technologies to fulfill their agendas. Additionally, it is not productive to look only at the "terminal effects" of technology; that is, analysis must go beyond the appearance, apparent utility, or increased convenience of a technology.⁹ Therefore,

⁵ Robin Dowden, "Museums and the Web 2012 Conference Notes," *Media Lab* (blog), Walker Art Center website, (categories: conferences, museums online), April 20, 2012, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/04/20/museums-the-web-2012-conference-notes/>. Dowden's post highlighted Rob Stein's advice "to make sure your digital strategy reflects the larger museum strategy."

⁶ Geert Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 13.

⁷ Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. (Minneapolis and London : University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 10. Galloway and Thacker viewed the use of technologies as a reflection of their political environment and warned against a view where "*Technology is assumed to, in effect, preexist politics.*"

⁸ Consider the arms race, the space race, the advent of the highway system and, of course, the Internet. They were all in responses to perceived Cold War threats.

⁹ Galloway and Thacker, *Exploit*, 7 and Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 47.

one must consider how the institution uses the website to support its practices to understand its relationship with online technologies.

A Local, National, and Global Reach

As the Walker's director, Olga Viso, stated in her annual director's report in 2012, "Our successes extend to our green spaces, our neighborhood, and the world, but they start right here inside our building, with our gallery presentations, film screenings, performances, and educational opportunities."¹⁰ Viso places the museum successes on local and global levels, but also ties them to the variety of offerings at the physical museum (Fig.1). While the bricks-and-mortar museum focuses on experiential offerings, its website focuses on informational offerings. Both, however, serve the same ends: to provide more institutional services and products.



Fig. 1 The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Northeast view.¹¹

¹⁰ Viso, "Year in Review," <http://www.walkerart.org/2011-2012-annual-report>.

¹¹ See Appendix for Letter of Permission for all the images in this thesis from the Walker Art Center Website. This image is from the Walker Art Website, accessed March 30, 2013, <http://www.walkerart.org/about/building-campus>.

The Walker's online strategy is rooted deeply in the successes of its "off line" enterprises. Posted on the Walker's home page, the director reported the museum's engagements or achievements in the cultural field as a featured news "article." For instance, the Walker hosted visiting members of the American Association of Museums for its 2012 conference held in Minneapolis St. Paul, a "national meeting of some 5,000 professionals from around the globe."¹² At that event, the Walker also launched the Minnesota Museums Month. Through a concerted effort, the state's 600 museums have designated May as a time to celebrate their roles and activities. Viso enthusiastically pointed out national media coverage from *The New York Times* that identified this month long event as the first such state level effort in the nation.¹³ Viso highlights this positive media coverage to promote the event's standing and to emphasize the Walker's role in the state wide effort. Additionally, the Walker's home page linked to *The New York Times* article in its "Art News From Elsewhere" section. Just as it does online, the Walker chooses what associates to make visible and thereby with whom it has aligned. Through its ability to construct its cultural field, the Walker asserts its cultural agency. Furthermore, as this demonstrates, the Walker operates through global, national, local, and media affiliations that, significantly, express certain scales of space ("the globe," the nation, and the state) as well as the ability (of information) to circulate through that space.

¹² Viso, "Year in Review," <http://www.walkerart.org/2011-2012-annual-report>. In September 2012, after its spring 2012 annual conference, the American Association of Museums changed its name to the American Alliance of Museums and rebranded its logo. Yet, it has maintained its acronym, AAM, which is well-known in the museum community.

¹³ Viso, "Year in Review," <http://www.walkerart.org/2011-2012-annual-report>. As a point of general knowledge, May is also National Museum Month and there are various local and city iterations throughout the nation. Viso does not cite the specific *New York Times* article in her report, but is certainly referring to the article by Carol Kino, "Set Aside a Day for Museums? Minnesota Thinks Bigger?," *NYTimes.com*, March 14, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/15/arts/artsspecial/minnesota-starts-museums-month-in-may.html?_r=0. A version of this article appeared in print on March 15, 2012, on page F36 of the *New York Times*, New York edition with the headline: "Set Aside a Day for Museums? Minnesota Thinks Bigger."

The Walker's challenge is to organize its affiliations as a curator might arrange objects in an exhibition display. For both its website and exhibitions, the arrangements of objects (digital or otherwise) constitute a specific spatial ordering that render them knowable in a controllable way. As for its relationships, the Walker acts like a node or aggregator by placing itself in the center and then arranging its affiliations around it. Likewise, the Walker explored the idea of the "the institution as a node or aggregator" in such exhibitions as *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age* in 2003 and *Brave New Worlds* in 2007-2008.¹⁴ For these projects, curators throughout the world acted as "news correspondents" who reported back to the Walker as the institutional hub that broadcasted the curators' stories. Paul Schmelzer, the *Walker Magazine's* managing editor, describes how the hub model enhances "the new power" of Walker's online platform:¹⁵

While we'll still present art in an exhibition format, which means traveling the world to select works to physically bring to our campus in Minneapolis, we also have a way to reverse the direction of attention. For instance, the global breakout group in our Programmatic Think Tank is working on establishing relationships with independent art venues and collectives in Jakarta, Cairo, Chiang Mai, Lagos, and elsewhere that are doing innovative work. We can use our platform not only to direct attention to them, but to share in conversation online about the kind of work we all want to do.¹⁶

This "reverse attention" on other global locations does not diminish the Walker's role or visibility in the world, but expands it. This is the power of its new online platform. The Walker is also targeting "independent art venues and collectives." Whether local or international, these smaller localized entities become outlets for the Walker's reach and influence and provide it with

¹⁴ Paul Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface: #Opencurating and the Walker's Digital Initiatives." *Media Lab* (blog). Walker Art Center website (category: projects), September 4, 2012, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/09/04/beyond-interface-opencurating-and-the-walkers-digital-initiatives/#more-2099>.

¹⁵ Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface," <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/09/04/beyond-interface-opencurating-and-the-walkers-digital-initiatives/#more-2099>.

¹⁶ Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface," <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/09/04/beyond-interface-opencurating-and-the-walkers-digital-initiatives/#more-2099>.

additional programming or cultural production value. A contracted freelancer or localized talent works similarly for a large corporation. By establishing connections to far-away locations, the Walker strengthens visibility as a center of global activities.

By contrast, as large museum complexes, the Guggenheim and the Louvre implement another strategy to create their globally networked institutions by building branch museums such as Guggenheim Bilbao and Louvre Abu Dhabi. Compared to Walker's "hub," the Louvre calls its system of international partnerships, branch museums, and exhibitions The Global Louvre.

The Walker also has an active traveling exhibition program. In the year since the launch of the new site, the Walker has produced two major shows from its "range of popular offerings": *Lifelike* and *Graphic Design: Now in Production*, in cooperation with the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum.¹⁷ It also organized a mix of shows featuring local and international artists, including Minneapolis-based Frank Gaard, Minouk Lim from Seoul, South Korea, Mexico City's Pedro Reyes, and the Berlin-based Swedish collaborators Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg. Its artistic "offerings" are as diverse as the audiences and attention it seeks.

Merce Cunningham: The Collection and the Website

A website aggregator of local cultural information on Minneapolis and St. Paul, *Secrets of the City*, wrote that the Walker's new website is "pretty darn cool. The new look moves the site into more of a content focused direction, but also makes it easier to see what's happening in the galleries."¹⁸ Indeed, the website does serve their galleries, though not exclusively. It also gives its collections visibility in a new informational landscape. Coverage of its collections, artistic documentation, archives, and exhibitions is featured on the home page, often as "Top

¹⁷ Viso, "Year in Review," <http://www.walkerart.org/2011-2012-annual-report>.

¹⁸ Paul Schmelzer, "'Gamechanger.' Early reviews of the new Walker website," *Media Lab* (blog), Walker Art Center website (category: announcements), December 5, 2011, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2011/12/05/reviews-of-the-new-walker-art-center-website/>.

Stories.” Moreover, the museum website and its online content are attached to the authority of its collection.

According to its latest annual report for 2011-2012, the Walker had 13,097 works in its collection. It acquired 476 works since the end of its fiscal year in June 2008 (including an additional 80 films for the Ruben Film Collection for a total of 862 works). Notably, this sizable increase occurred during the largest economic recession in a century. Significantly, in 2011, the Walker announced its single largest acquisition of more than 150 items from the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC). Working with a group of funders, the Walker purchased items related to Cunningham’s performances including set pieces, costumes, and props created by renowned contemporary artists including Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, John Cage and Frank Stella. As the Walker Press Release stated, “The acquisition of major works from the MCDC collection aligns with the Walker’s cross-disciplinary collecting strategy and its mission to present contemporary art in a multidisciplinary context.”¹⁹ While the Walker champions performance and other intangible arts experiences through its events programming, it still actively builds its collection.

The Walker has had a long history with Merce Cunningham and, during his lifetime, it supported his artistic production with nine residences, three commissions, 17 separate events, and an exhibition. Cunningham passed away on July 26, 2009, and, in keeping with Cunningham’s wishes that his company end after his death, his dance company then conducted its last, farewell tour before it disbanded in December 2011. Cunningham’s art was inherently ephemeral, and the tangible objects from his performances can only ever reference the intangible

¹⁹ “Walker Art Center Acquires Merce Cunningham Dance Company Collection,” Walker Art Center Press Release, posted March 2011, accessed November 17, 2012, <http://www.walkerart.org/press/browse/press-releases/2011/walker-art-center-acquires-merce-cunningham-d>. The press release did not specify the day of the month of its publication.

experiences that Cunningham created for his audience. Yet, with these objects in its possession, the Walker featured a whole series of new programs based on this acquisition including a succession of three exhibitions entitled *Dance Works*, performances by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company on its Legacy Tour, and an array of related events to draw audiences to the Walker.

Likewise, collections are important to museums that embrace technology. Known for his work with E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology), as the curator for the important MoMA exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* held in New York in 1968, and as a museum director, formerly at the Pompidou Center and later at the Jean Tinguely museum, Pontus Hultén (1924 – 2006) had long worked toward lowering the barriers between art and technology. For instance, as a curator Hultén used the museum as the center for telematic connections to promote audience participation on a global scale in his *Utopians and Visionaries 1871-1981* exhibition in Modern Museet, Stockholm in 1971. At that exhibition, the audience could pose questions over a telex to other people in Bombay, Tokyo and New York.²⁰ Hultén readily used technology to enhance the museum experience.

When considering the relationship between art objects and representative technologies, Hultén still emphasized the importance of the collection. As he stated, “I think a collection is absolutely fundamental. The failure of André Malraux’s Maisons de la Culture can be traced to the fact that he was really aiming at theater. He wasn’t thinking about how to build a museum, and that’s why his cultural institution foundered. The collection is the backbone of an institution.”²¹ Notably, André Malraux’s project was to display photographic documents of existing art works that supposedly focused on the stylistic qualities of the art, regardless of their

²⁰ Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Pontus Hultén,” in *A Brief History of Curating*, trans. Judith Hayward (Zurich and Dijon: JRP/Ringier & Les Presses Du Réel, 2011), 44-45.

²¹ Obrist, “Pontus Hultén,” 46-47.

original medium. His aim was to render a collection of art into a collection of aesthetic images. By contrast, Hultén explains, “A collection isn’t a shelter into which to retreat, it’s a source of energy for the curator as much as the visitor.”²² Even while technology can capture, replication, and disseminate the images of art, a museum relies on its collection to nurture curatorial activities and attract visitors.

Correspondingly, the Walker’s online response to the Merce Cunningham additions to its collection was suitably strategic and productive. From the announcement of the Cunningham acquisition until the end of the third and last of the special *Dance Works* exhibitions – March 2011 to March 2013 – the Walker website regularly presented new and archived material related to Merce Cunningham including exhibitions, performances, workshops, talks, commentary, etc. During this time, the Walker was prolific in its website coverage of Cunningham through its various media platforms including articles, blog posts, and videos. At the end of this period, a general search on the Walker website for “Merce Cunningham” revealed over 250 items on the site in a variety of media categories including text or “Writings,” “Events,” “Audio/Video,” “Works of Art,” and items from the “Walker Shop.”²³ Of these, about 130 were “Writings” items: over a hundred items were from after the 2011 acquisition, and less than two dozen of them were from before then, though the results go back as far as 2004.

With the redesigned website uploaded in December 2011, the Walker’s new online platform prominently featured its Merce Cunningham related material, as well as aggregated media from other sources. Over the first few days of the new site, multiple items about Cunningham appeared in the website’s new “Top Stories” section, right along with articles

²² Obrist, “Pontus Hultén,” 47.

²³ On April 6, 2012, after entering the search terms “Merce Cunningham” in the search field on the top of the walkerart.org screen, the site search returned 251 items in total as a result. The last of the three special exhibitions of the 2011 Merce Cunningham acquisitions, *Dance Works III*, ended on March 24, 2013.

celebrating the Walker's new website (Fig. 2). The stories included two articles on Cunningham's collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg. This was also the theme of *Dance Works I: Merce Cunningham/Robert Rauschenberg*, the first of the three special exhibitions inspired by the Cunningham acquisitions on display at that time.



Fig. 2 The Walker Art Center Website, “Cunningham & Rauschenberg’s First Decade,” December 3, 2011. www.walkerart.org.

Videos, both new and from the Walker's online archive, also became available on its new homepage and through the *Walker Channel*, Walker's online collection of documentary videos. A video commemoration, *Remembering Merce*, was released December 7, 2011 – within the first week of the new site. Its “Art News from Elsewhere” section linked to several related stories from the *New York Times* including an article on a Cunningham App.²⁴ Prior to the new website,

²⁴ Julie Bloom, “Even in Death a Choreographer Is Mixing Art and Technology,” *NYTimes.com*, August 9, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/10/arts/dance/even-in-death-a-choreographer-is-mixing-artand>

the Walker's web, likewise, linked to outside media referring back its activities. A March 24, 2011, Walker blog post, "On the Walker's acquisition of the Merce Cunningham Dance Co. collection," also provided hyperlinks to related media coverage by the New York Times, Star Tribune, and Minnesota Public Radio, as well as the Walker's own official Press Release.²⁵ In these ways, the collection supported the production of museum activities and cultural expositions for both its physical and online sites.

In a reciprocal fashion, the website portrays the museum as a site to experience events and view objects and, also, as an institution that can guide audiences' understanding of art. For instance, on the one hand, the website presents exhibition articles, performance announcements, or blog postings about museum events such as "'Lumps and Bumps' in the Night: A Kawakubo/Cunningham Halloween" in 2012.²⁶ These items promote the physical museum, but also personalize the experience of Walker events for online audiences. On the other hand, its stories also guide audiences through the various roles, responsibilities, and views of the museum and its staff. Several stories addressed the nature of collecting and conserving of objects related to performance art, including Abigail Sebaly's featured article, "The Trace: Search for the Imprint Movement Leaves Behind," which also addressed Cunningham's work.²⁷ By these means, the website celebrates the Walker's activities, legitimizes its collection, and supports its role as cultural interpreter.

technology.html?_r=0. A version of this article appeared in print on August 10, 2012, on page C2 of the *New York Times* New York edition with the headline "Even in Death a Choreographer Is Mixing Art and Technology."

²⁵ Julie Caniglia. "On the Walker's acquisition of the Merce Cunningham Dance Co. collection," *Untitled (Blog)*. The Walker Art Center website. March 24, 2011, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/visualarts/2011/03/24/on-the-walkers-acquisition-of-the-merce-cunningham-dance-co-collection/>. Within this blog post, some of the links that the Walker provided are currently defunct.

²⁶ Kristina Fong. "'Lumps and Bumps' in the Night: A Kawakubo/Cunningham Halloween." *Field Guide* (blog). The Walker Art Center website. October 30, 2012. <http://blogs.walkerart.org/ecp/2012/10/30/lumps-and-bumps-kawakubo-cunningham-halloween/>.

²⁷ Sebaly, Abigail. "The Trace" Searching for the Imprint Movement Leaves Behind." *Walker Magazine*. Walker Art Center website. August 14, 2012, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2012/merce-cunningham-collection-research-minouk-l>.

The website also supports the physical life of the Walker in other small ways. For instance, it visibly references its geographically based site on the website. On the website's front page, near the Menu Caption "Visit," the Walker reports its current weather conditions. It gives the temperature, a visual icon (a raining cloud or sun for example), and a simple word description of the weather (snowing, windy, etc). While suiting the newspaper format, what appears to serve a practical purpose also reminds web visitors that the museum is a location to visit as well. In the left margin, under the date and hours, "Today's Events" (Fig. 2) also offers a list of on-site experiences to be had at the museum.

The Collection as a Timeline: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Collections also inspire website strategies for other museums. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has a collection of nearly two million works, and, as of 2011, it featured digital images and museum documentation of more than 340,000 works. The site strategically places this information into institutional contexts to frame how individuals explore the collection and the museum. As the Metropolitan's director, Mr. Thomas P. Campbell, expressed, "We hope the new website will provide our online visitors with immediate, easy-to-navigate access to the works of art in our collection, including beautiful photography and in-depth information prepared by the Museum's experts who study and care for them."²⁸

Notably, the Metropolitan's *Helibrunn Timeline of Art History* (Fig. 3) was already well established on the museum's website, but with the site's redesign launched in September 2011, the timeline occupied a more prominent role and was better integrated into site to present nearly seven thousand works from the collection. The *Helibrunn Timeline* skillfully maintains the museum's encyclopedic organizing strategy. Spanning a period of over five thousand years, the

²⁸ "Metropolitan Museum Launches Expanded, Redesigned Website, Providing Unprecedented Access to Collections, Programs, Research, and Visitor Information (Press Release)," The Metropolitan Museum Website, September 26, 2011, <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/news/2011/website-press-release>.

objects, from all over the world, are arranged by chronology and geographical origin, under the labels “In Time” and “In the World,” respectively. As the Metropolitan website states, “Across the world and across time, our collections are a passport to our past, and key to understanding our present and future.”²⁹ It also features essays explaining particular art historical categories, which the Metropolitan describes as “universal concepts.”³⁰ These writings describe art works within specific contexts including places, time periods, artistic styles, or themes that fit the museum’s preferred organizing methodology. For example, essays may cover the Parisian School of the early twentieth century or the Icons and Iconoclasm in Byzantium. Moreover, for those objects that are on display in the museum’s galleries, it also links the collections material to gallery maps and related exhibition information. It is also the section of the website most visited by scholars, teachers, and students.³¹ The timeline continues to grow in size and scope. The timeline also depends on the museum’s staff to expand and to keep its current. A committee of curators provides input on the site’s content and over 150 curators, conservators, educators, and librarians contribute work to the timeline.³² The site’s strength is how it showcases the museum’s extensive collection through high quality digital documentation, staff research, and media programs.

²⁹ “One Met. Many Worlds.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art website, Accessed May 18, 2013. <http://www.metmuseum.org/mymet/many-worlds>. This webpage describes the Metropolitan’s different online programs with linked images with short descriptions. The quote is from the description of the overall strategy to “One Met. Many Worlds.”

³⁰ “One Met. Many Worlds.” The Metropolitan website, <http://www.metmuseum.org/mymet/many-worlds>. The phrase “universal concepts” comes from the description or caption for the *Helibrunn Timeline*.

³¹ Carol Vogel, “Three Out of Four Visitors to the Met Never Make It to the Front Door,” The New York Times website, March 30, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20060330thursday.html. Originally published in print in the New York Times Arts Section on March 29, 2006.

³² Vogel, “Visitors to the Met,” http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20060330thursday.html.

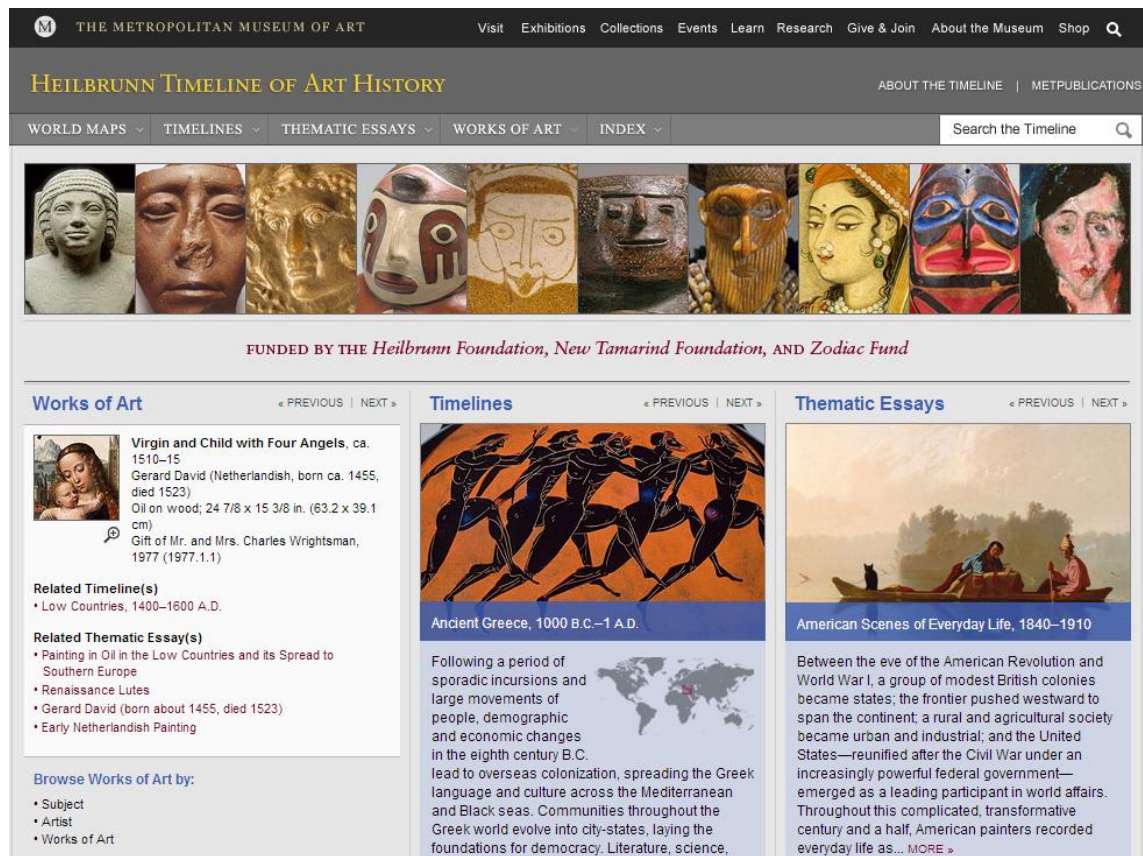


Fig. 3 The Metropolitan Museum of Art website, “Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,” May 28, 2013. www.metmuseum.org/toah. Copyright 2000-2013 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.³³

The collection is one resource for online activities, but museum websites relate to their physical realities in many ways. Inverting the idea of “virtual reality,” sociologist Manuel Castells calls contemporary technological culture “real virtuality” to capture the notion that real social, political, cultural and economic activities are conducted through electronic

³³ Metropolitan Museum of Art Website, www.metmuseum.org: **Authorized Uses.** The Materials are made available for limited non-commercial, educational, and personal use only, or for fair use as defined in the United States copyright laws. Users may download these files for their own use, subject to any additional terms or restrictions which may be applicable to the individual file or program. Users must, however, cite the author and source of the Materials as they would material from any printed work, and the citations should include the URL “www.metmuseum.org.” By downloading, printing, or otherwise using Materials, whether accessed directly from this website or via other sites or mechanisms, users agree that they will limit their use of such files to non-commercial, educational, personal or for fair use, and will not violate the Museum’s or any other party’s proprietary rights. Users may not remove any copyright, trademark, or other proprietary notices, including without limitation attribution information, credits, and copyright notices that have been placed on or near the Materials by the Museum. Downloading, printing, copying, distributing or otherwise using Materials for commercial purposes, including commercial publication or personal gain, is expressly prohibited. Users may not modify Materials on the Site.

communications systems.³⁴ Certainly, real people act through, and real consequences result from, the use of “virtual” technologies. Museums and their sites seek broad audiences and promote themselves as centers of artistic activity. As for the Walker, the website operates as a “hub” that seeks to extend the museum’s institutional reach and grow its audiences.

³⁴ Manuel Castells, “Museums in the Information Era: Cultural Connectors of Time and Space.” In *Museum in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 428.

SECTION 2: THE WALKER ART CENTER'S FRONT PAGE PRODUCTION

Front Page Coverage

As a media platform, the Walker Art Center website, walkerart.org, was redesigned to emulate aspects of news or journalism websites. In keeping with its new appearance, the site highlights its new editorial features. This heightened visibility also requires regular updates and its focus on self published content suits its news driven format. Accordingly, the Walker provides a high volume of online media content to attract and to maintain its online audiences. Yet, this content is not unique to each page. Much of the content reappears through differently formatted access points throughout the rest of the website, and vice versa, it takes existing online material previously with less visible and reorganizes it for front page status. The homepage functions as a unifying façade to the larger online space that the website occupies. Additionally, instead of depending on a singular institutional point of view, the Walker has embraced the new subjectivity of online media. The environment of online media also has encouraged the proliferation of its institutional offerings. The abundance of the website's content serves to expand its online audiences and its institutional reach. The Walker wants to connect both to audiences and other arts media, but, ultimately, its goal is to increase its influence *through* them and to strengthen its position as a cultural center. By carefully examining the details of the Walker's website, its institutional strategy will become apparent.

With "WALKER" in all caps, its bold "masthead" remains affixed to top of the page when scrolling down. It works well as a branding element and keeps the website's primary menu of options to its content in sight and easily accessible, while moving through the rest of the page below it. A header with both an identifying branding name or/and logo and menu options is typical for websites, however, keeping a header row "locked" or "frozen" on the screen is

uncommon for news and museum websites.³⁵ Though, notably, fixed headers appear regularly on entertainment media sites such as HBO.com and Hulu.com.

Borrowing journalistic nomenclature, the Walker's website places its "Top Stories" section at the top of its homepage. These stories appear in a prominent feature's window in the wide center column as an image with a caption. An image and caption regularly change in several second intervals and present, in-turn, each of the current "Top Stories" listed on the right. The effect is like the looping of ads on a digital billboard or the rotating images of a banner advertisement along the border of a website. The short time each story is allotted in the feature's window is designed to entice visitors to click to the full story. Moreover, most of the "articles" focus on the Walker or its exhibitions and activities such as its film retrospective in the spring of 2013 for filmmaker Noah Baumbach and its Internet Cat Video Festival (Fig. 4).

The Walker's membership department also makes use of "Top Stories." In a series called "Introducing..." member profiles are written in an interview style and individuals share what they like about the Walker and what Walker events they have attended. This highly subjective and promotional membership show-and-tell is deemed worthy of the website's "pride of place."

While the Walker staff produces most of its "Top Stories," it also showcases articles from partners and commissions. For instance, over the last year, the Barcelona-based curatorial team Latitudes wrote several articles associated with the #OpenCurating interview series about

³⁵ None of these websites demonstrated a fixed header: NYTimes.com, huffingtonpost.com, cnn.com, washingtonpost.com, thetimes.co.uk, metmuseum.org, louvre.fr, artgallery.yale.edu, guggenheim.org, si.edu, tate.org.uk, hermitagemuseum.org, getty.edu. There are many more. Of the many sites I visited, I only saw two museums websites with a fixed header or border: the Hirshhorn Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (hirshhorn.si.edu) and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City (moma.org). The Hirshhorn's web content moved laterally below the fixed header, while MoMA's web actually placed its "header" on the bottom of the screen. Entertainment media sites also typically have this feature including HBO (hbo.com), Hulu (hulu.com), Netflix (movies.netflix.com/WiHome), and Showtime (sho.com).

“digital strategies in the arts.”³⁶ The Walker proudly proclaims that it is the “exclusive content partner” supporting Latitude’s #OpenCurating project.³⁷ With content either by its affiliates and staff, “Top Stories” promotes the Walker’s interests.

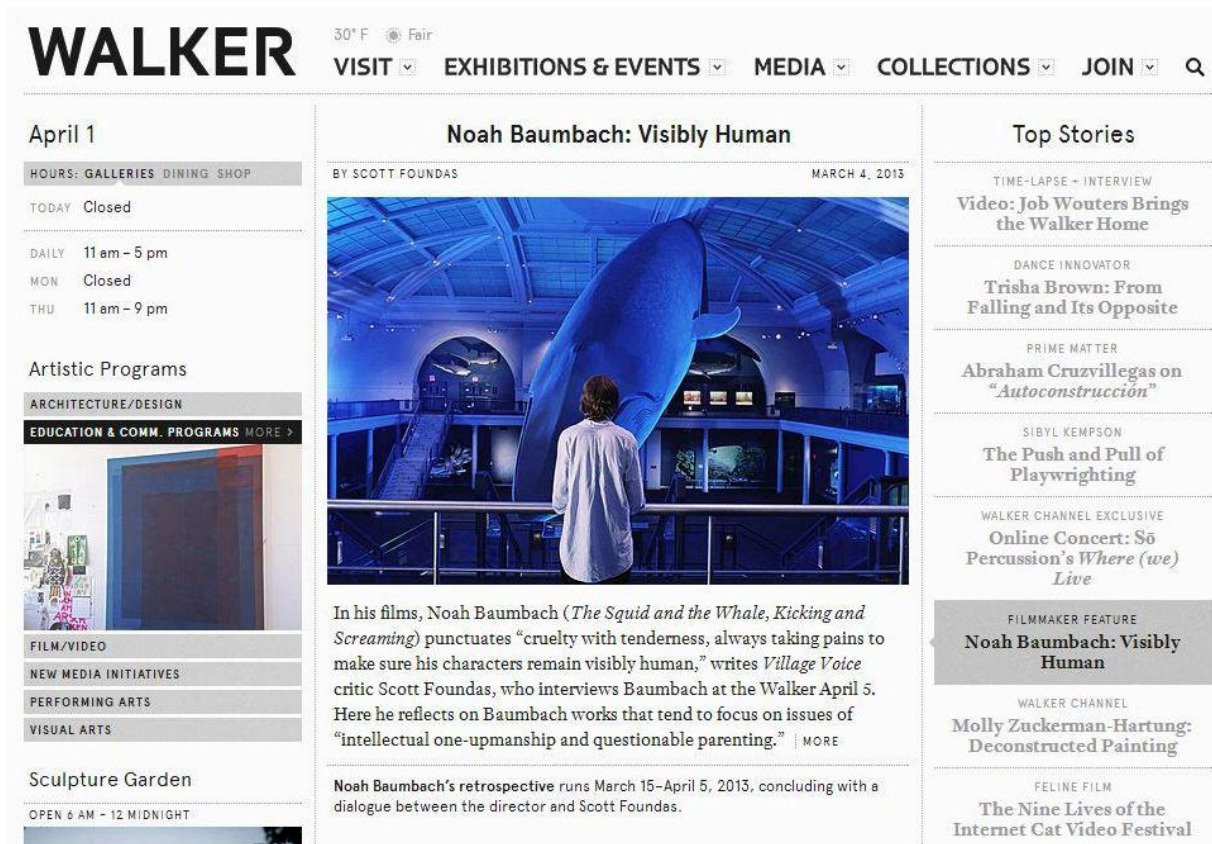


Fig. 4 Walker Art Center Website, “Top Stories,” April 1, 2013, walkerart.org.

“Top Stories” is followed by “Art News From Elsewhere,” a section of arts-related journalism aggregated from a range of sources outside the Walker. This selection of six online stories is presented in a tidy grid: the top row with images and each with an extended caption. Each story links the viewer to the content at another site. These links connect to news, essays,

³⁶ Latitudes, “From One History to a Plurality of Histories: An #OpenCurating Interview with Steven ten Thije,” *Walker Magazine*, Walker Art Center website, January 7, 2013, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2013/steven-ten-thije-van-abbemuseum-opencurating>. The #OpenCurating series will hold ten interviews in total when completed.

³⁷ Latitudes, “Free Forms: An #OpenCurating Interview with Lauren Cornell,” *Walker Magazine*, Walker Art Center website, May 3, 2013, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2013/free-forms-opencurating-lauren-cornell>. Walker’s statement of exclusive support is located in the right margin.

blogs, videos, podcasts, projects, and other media from the art world at large. They present a wider context for the Walker's articles, activities, and other information presented throughout the site. For example, on April 4, 2013, "Art News From Elsewhere" presented stories related to digital art ("Tumblr Art" on Rhizome.org), arts journalism ("Critical Miss" from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel online), and artist funding ("Going It Alone" from Artforum.com) (Fig.5). This section also acknowledges news that is generally considered important or relevant to the arts community and can do so in a timely fashion by linking to it. This includes a story marking the passing of the popular film critic Roger Ebert.

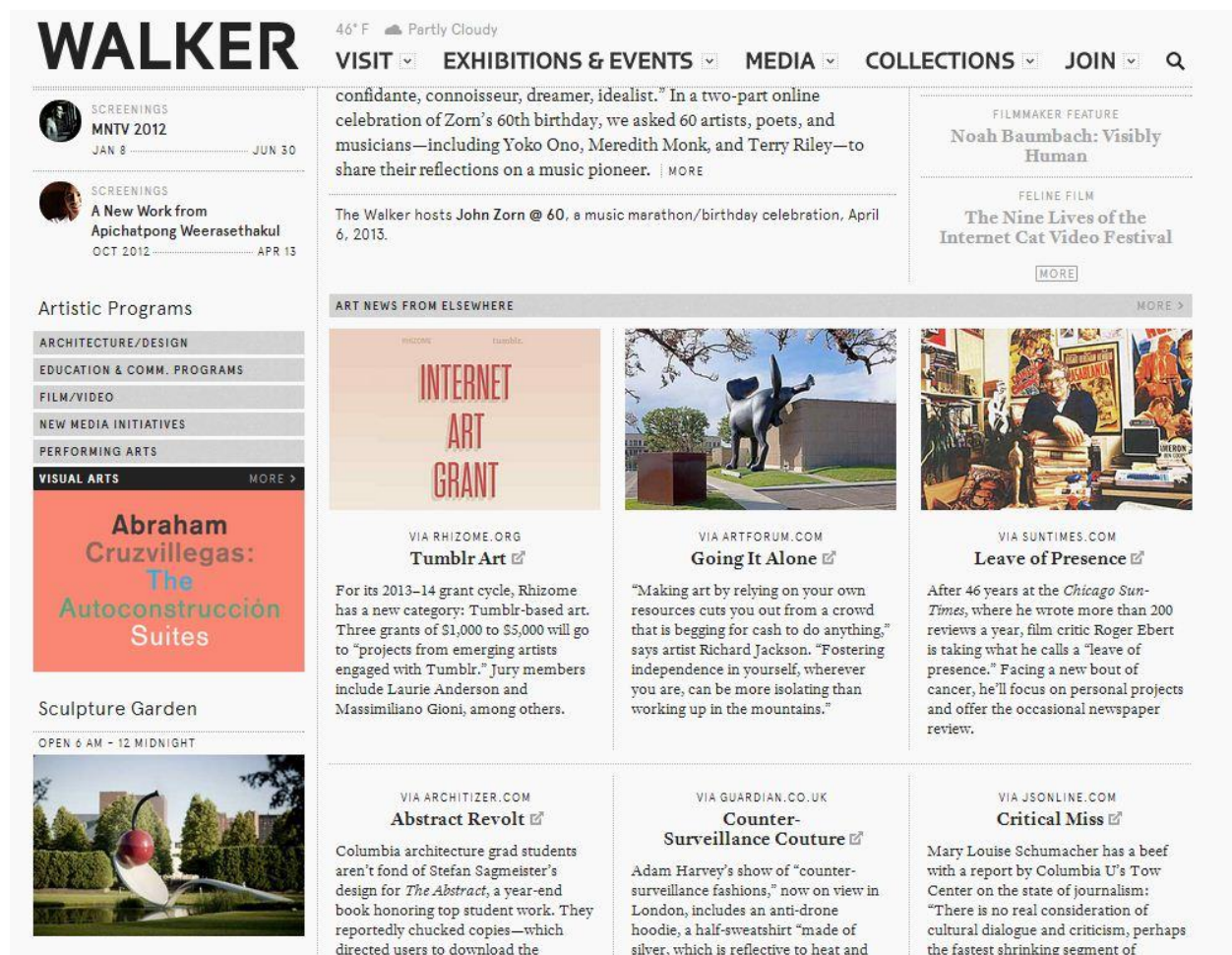


Fig. 5 Walker Art Center Website, "Art News From Elsewhere," April 4, 2013, walkerart.org.

At the “crease” (in keeping with the newspaper metaphor), a group of terse text-only links (Fig. 6) provides another level of access to outside sourced material and sometimes to archived Walker material related to featured stories or other current interests. “News from Elsewhere” and the text-only links mix the mundane with the political and sometimes break the barrier of the normally insular arts media to connect to stories about war and political activism, in so far as they relate to arts, music, performances, or other “aesthetic” activities. Below the crease is the “Walker Blogs” section with three selections from the Walker’s nine blogs. Next is “Minnesota Art News!” (Fig. 6 and 7) with material from mnartists.org, a free access website for Minnesota artists created by the Walker and McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based philanthropic organization. The Walker’s mnartist.blog is also run by mnartists.org. Highlighted by the bright blue of the “Minnesota Art News!” label, the Walker’s affiliated group has multiple outlets on the front page to express its interests to the Walker’s larger audience.

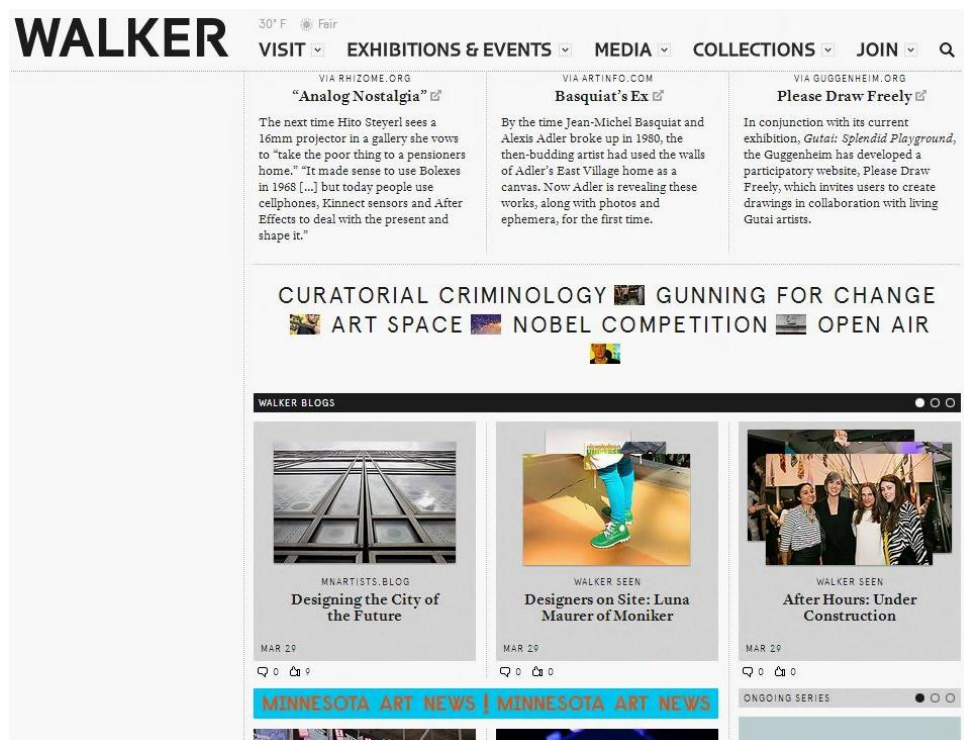


Fig. 6 Walker Art Center Website, “‘The Crease’ and Blogs,” April 1, 2013, walkerart.org.

In two smaller windows below, video stills and captions appear under the headings “Artspeaks” and the “Walker Channel,” labeled boldly in red and black (Fig. 7). They link to video content recycled from the Walker’s media archives located at the *Walker Channel*, walkerart.org/channel. “ArtSpeaks” features artist interviews, talks, or commentary, while the “Walker Channel” presents the Walker’s full range of video. On the lower right, other supplemental categories are listed. The “Ongoing Series” displays material related to ongoing projects including catalogues, online articles, etc. Then, from one of Walker’s seven Twitter accounts (the micro-blogging social media platform), it posts a tweet (a broadcasted text comment of no more than 140 characters). Finally, “From the Archives” offers a mix of archived options. Organized in this way, the Walker’s front page presents a mix of different media (articles, blogs, video, etc.), arranged in the order of their “news” or content priorities.

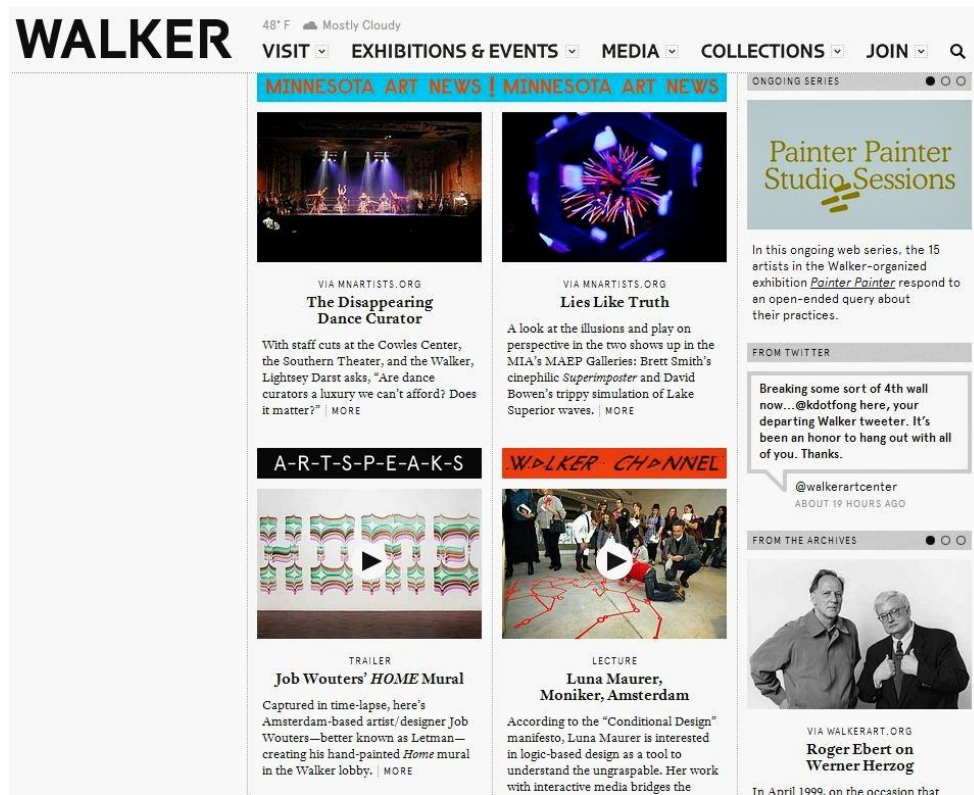


Fig. 7 Walker Art Center Website, “Minnesota Art News!, ArtSpeaks, and *Walker Channel*,” April 6, 2013, walkerart.org.

Mixed Media: A Strategy At-Large

The Walker homepage acts as the front page to a larger body of material presented in its entirety as the *Walker Magazine* online. Beyond the front page, the *Walker Magazine* consists of new and archived material located at walkerart.org/magazine. In the main menu along the top of the page, the “Media” tab’s menu box also lists “Walker Magazine (News & Articles)” as the first of its media options (Fig. 8). This “Media” menu also includes the Walker’s online media platforms or web pages: the collection of nine “Walker Blogs” and the “Walker Channel (Video).” Moreover, on front page or façade of the Walker’s site, as detailed above, these different media reappear under the *Walker Magazine*’s different sections to support the website’s overall priorities as a publishing and multimedia platform.



Fig. 8 Walker Art Center Website, “Media” Tab Menu Box”, April 1, 2013.

Once an online user has clicked on one of the stories to read, other items are offered to keep the user clicking to more content. Underneath the story, the field “Related Events” (Fig. 9) has links to three additional items with similar subject matter. The “More Like This” (Fig. 9) box also slides out from the bottom right with three more options. However, the box only appears when the user gets close to the end of the page.

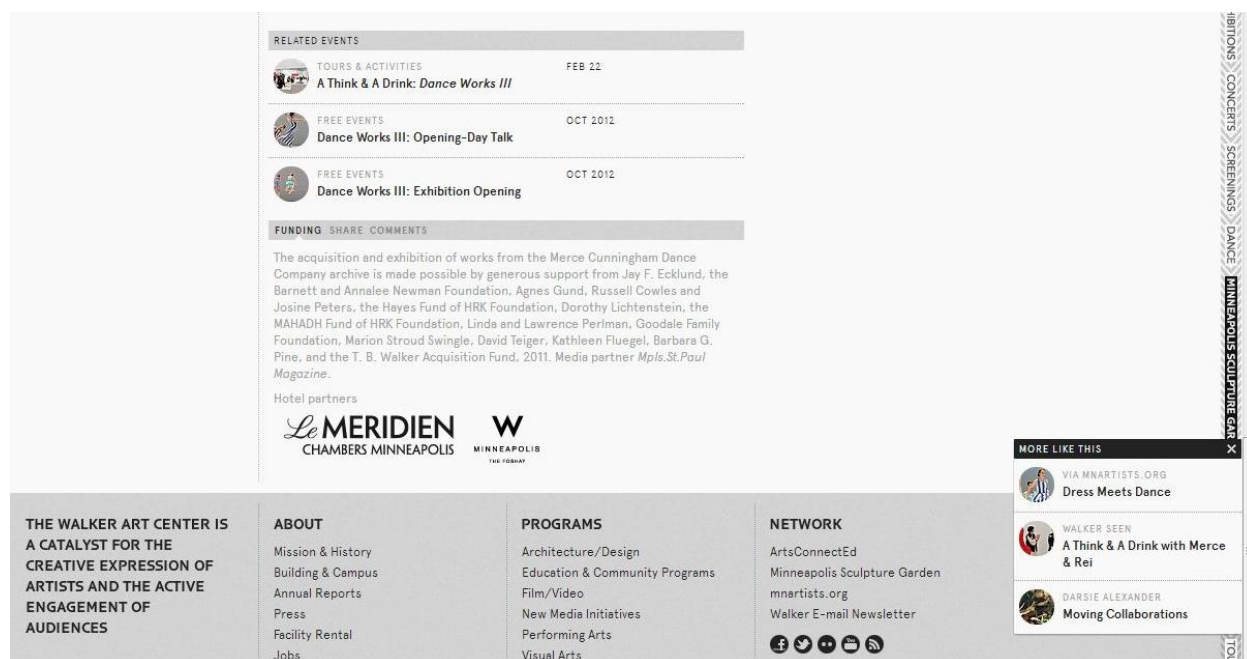


Fig. 9 Walker Art Center Website, “Merce Cunningham with Rei Kawakubo: Dance Works III,” (Bottom of the Page: More Like This and Related Events), April 1, 2013, www.walkerart.org/calendar/2012/dance-works-iii-merce-cunningham-rei-kawakubo.

This multiple content approach shifts away from the older standard model for a museum website as an explicit mass marketing tool to advertise a museum’s exhibitions and events. During what might be considered the first phase of museum websites in the 1990s and early 2000s, museums initially and most typically used their websites to broadcast the museum’s basic operations information: hours, location, and current exhibitions and events, as well as some carefully vetted description of the institution. Occasionally, they would use it to broadcast information useful for public relations and to garner attention from media outlets, such as a new museum building project. Since then, museums have varied their website content to reach multiple audiences but ultimately, the websites have maintained their marketing and audience building purposes. With multiple publishing platforms and sources, the new Walker website also provides more front page visibility for content from multiple sources within the institution. Its aggregated content also displays how others relate to the Walker, online and in its analogue

operations. The website's multiple and distinctly branded sections expand the variety of stories that could attract viewers to the site.

Journalism Designed for the Attention Economy

Overall, the Walker design staff based its new website design on two online sources, the *New York Times* site and *The Huffington Post*. It decided to more closely follow relatively tidy formatting of *NYTimes.com* which it deemed "classier."³⁸ The staff, however, was interested explicitly in *The Huffington Post*'s use of "slippery, weirdly click-enticing design tricks" including attention grabbing headlines, dramatic changes in font sizes and font colors.³⁹ It appears that the Walker's judicious use of color also aided the visibility of some section labels further down the page. Importantly, this aspect of design relates to how one measures the success of a website. In general, a website benefits from keeping online audiences on its site as long as possible and by getting them to click on, and consume, more of its content. This is the impact of the "attention economy."

The attention economy is based on the notion that audiences are customers whose attention is an economic resource defined by scarcity.⁴⁰ Attention is the currency of the Internet.⁴¹ Ironically, this also means keeping news stories simple, short, and easily digestible – to reduce the time it takes to consume them. Representing a limited investment, each story must grab the audience's interest in an abbreviated time. This is contrary to traditional journalistic impulses, especially in investigative journalism which requires a great investment of time in both

³⁸ Eric Price, "Walkerart.org Design Notes #1," *Media Lab* (blog), Walker Art Center Website, May 25, 2012, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/05/25/design-notes-1/>.

³⁹ Price, "Walkerart.org Design," <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/05/25/design-notes-1/>.

⁴⁰ Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*, 17 and 152. The "attention economy" is a concept that applies to the quantification and exchange value of attention in our information economies and social networks. It was first used in a 1971 speech by Nobel laureate Herbert Simon to define attention in terms of scarcity and economic impact. Several economists and business writers discuss it including Thomas H. Davenport and John C. Beck's 2002 book *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* as well as Jonathan Beller, Michael Goldhaber and Georg Franck.

⁴¹ Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*, 152.

researching and reporting the complexities of what it has uncovered. Without a profitable return for in-depth stories, news outlets reduce costs by supplementing their own reporting with information provided to them. In return, companies provide news outlets with upbeat sound bites that depict them in favorable terms. For the tech or media industries, news coverage is reduced to consumer reviews or pronouncements about the latest innovations. As Net critic Geert Lovink states, “Journalism these days amounts to little more than outsourced PR remixing.”⁴² Additionally, entertainment often filters through as news.

The Huffington Post fittingly represents these current trends in journalism. It aggregates a mix of the banal, ridiculous, and salacious, with serious business or political reporting (linked to respected legacy media companies that still invest in traditional journalism). It conveniently labels short blurbs “QuickRead” (when the cursor is passed over them) and provides quick video clips. The attention driven economy is especially evident online.

The Subjective Voice: Blogs and Institutional Authority

In interpreting the cultural past and present, museums are empowered to speak through the objects under their care. They present the official stories of the past through the selection and management of fragmentary evidence. In addition to narrating the stories about objects and their makers, museums decide on their methods of presentation and chose particular media formats to best convey their points of view. The type of media used influences how the presented information is understood.⁴³ The authoring of online content works similarly. The newspaper format of the Walker website presents its selection of stories about art as news, as relevant and substantive information, backed by the authority of the museum institution and its collection. Furthermore, as with museum exhibitions, curators do more than present selected objects; they

⁴² Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*, 178.

⁴³ Parry, *Recoding the Museum*, 3.

construct meaning. Likewise, the Walker's website not only reports information, but it asserts the agency of the museum as an author. Aligning its roles as cultural steward and author, the Walker demonstrates its authority to actively create cultural meaning. As the *Walker Magazine's* editor, Paul Schmelzer, stated, "The site also makes us the principle actor in our own message."⁴⁴

The Walker conveys its authority online through a news format, though its method of storytelling conflates the notions of subjectivity and truth. While it adopts an online journal format for its website, it makes no assertion of objectivity. Schmelzer believes that when it comes to journalism "transparency is the new objectivity" and argues that "rather than claiming to transcend subjectivity, something that seems an impossibility, embrace transparency by showing the sources of your work and sharing your processes, values, and biases."⁴⁵ In this regard, the Walker website promotes subjective sharing and readily displays its relationships. As an online aggregator, it selects the information that it deems relevant and assumes the authority to decide what is news-worthy. The site's various articles, videos, blogs, and affiliate websites comprise a collection of different or subjective perspectives. The website strategically uses this information to make connections and to broadcast a range of related opinions. Shifting from "news" to "stories," the online articles attempt a conversational tone instead of being pedantic, but this type of subjective storytelling relates to the public in ways that still benefit the museum's institutional goals. It differs from previous overt marketing strategies of traditional museum websites, but the significance of the stories still relies on the authority of the museum and the audiences' interest in hearing its points of view.

⁴⁴ Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface," <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/09/04/beyond-interface-opencurating-and-the-walkers-digital-initiatives/#more-2099>.

⁴⁵ Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface" <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/09/04/beyond-interface-opencurating-and-the-walkers-digital-initiatives/#more-2099>

As previously mentioned, the Walker website boasts nine blogs (Fig. 10). This represents a larger cultural trend which is particularly notable for its effects on museums. Blogs are a popular form of social media and were an earlier facilitator of the online self publishing boom starting in mid and late 1990s. With the success of blogging and its ability to attract audiences, museums adapted this medium to fit their institution purposes. Museums have also spent the last few decades attempting to dispel notions that they are elitist or austere institutions. By inviting audiences into a social environment that welcomed their comments and by suggesting that the museum's views were only one among many, museum blogs sought new ways to engage and to expand their audiences. Accordingly, Robin Dowden, the Walker's Director of New Media Initiatives, explained that "the Walker's blogs step outside the official content, thereby humanizing the Walker and in the process, promoting the programs and people within it."⁴⁶

Over the last decade, blogs have become common place for arts organizations and museums and have encouraged the growth of specialized communications for niche audiences interested in arts and culture.⁴⁷ In a phenomenon called the "long tail," new patterns have emerged for the consumption of online content and goods.⁴⁸ In fact, the online self-publishing trend and proliferation of personalized content relies on the idea that anything produced for the Internet can elicit some interest, even if it is only with a small group of consumers. Communications strategies have altered in response to the Internet to the ability of audiences to find and to connect to many sources. Instead of one media message broadcasted to the largest audience possible, the long tail produces a multitude of products, each targeting specific

⁴⁶ Robin Dowden, "New Media Initiatives," *The Walker Art Center Annual Report 2006-2007*, http://annualreport.walkerart.org/2007/WAC_AR_07.pdf. Originally quoted from page 60 in the print version.

⁴⁷ Pew Internet and American Life Project, *Arts Organizations and Digital Technologies* (report), Pew Research Center, January 4, 2013,

<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Arts-and-technology/Main-Report/Section-3.aspx>. Of the arts organizations that have a website (97% of those surveyed), 50% maintain at least one blog.

⁴⁸ Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 320.

audiences. The new aim is to enhance the visibility and accessibility of the assorted products, so audiences can find them. To this end, the Walker's blogs are accessible either on its revamped homepage, via the "Media" tab menu, or through their designated domain at blogs.walkerart.org (Fig. 10).

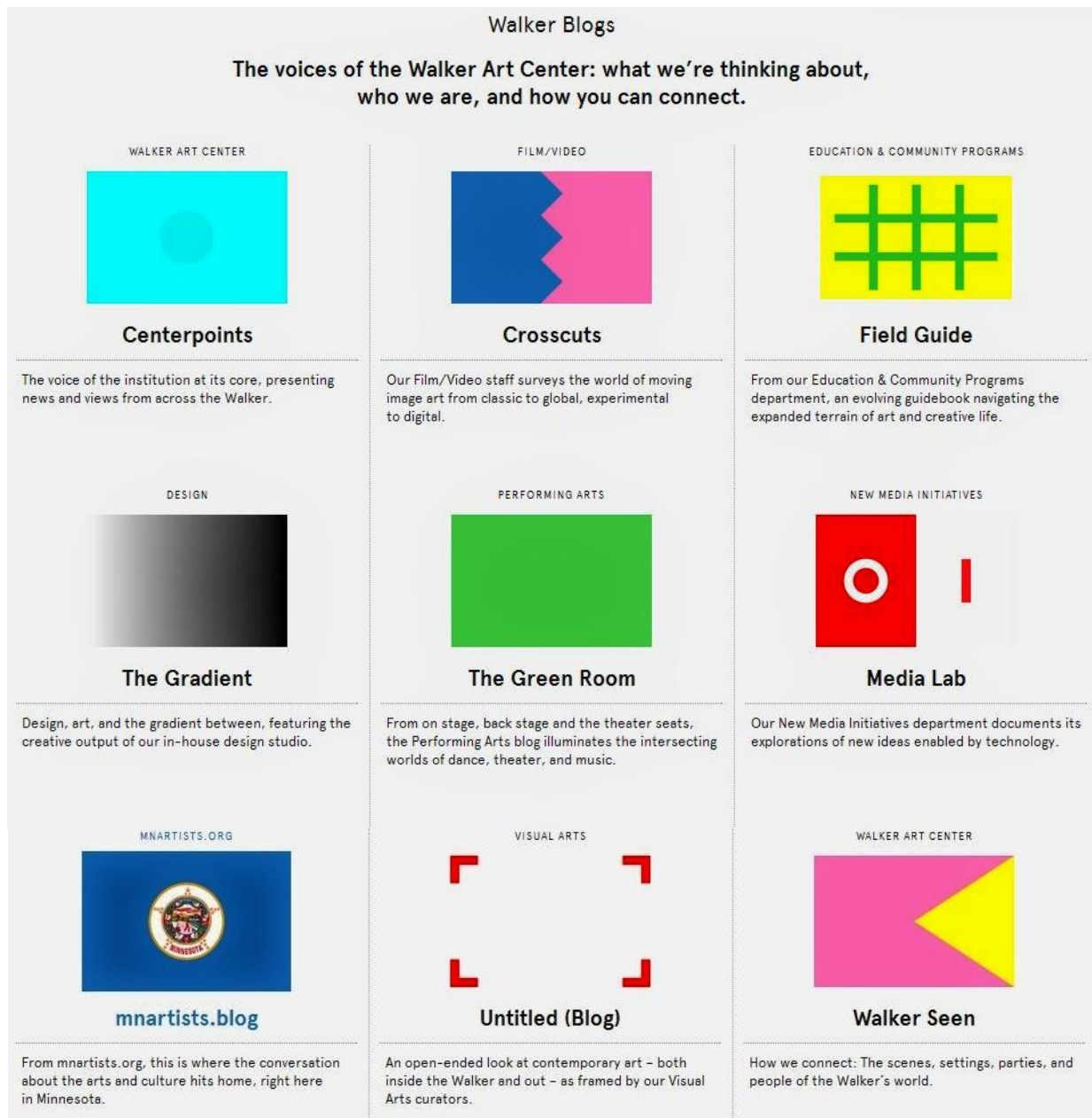


Fig. 10 Walker Art Center Website, *Walker Blogs*, April 5, 2013, blogs.walkerart.org.

The Walker's website inaugurated its first blog in 2005. In its first year, online visitors to the Walker blog rose 30 percent each month.⁴⁹ The Walker quickly seized upon this momentum, and, by 2006, it expanded to six blogs representing different artistic disciplines or interests. This strategy proved very successful for attracting online audiences. In the following fiscal year, from July 2006 through June 2007, this collection of blogs was the most visited area of the Walker's website.⁵⁰ Since then, the blogs' audiences have steadily grown. The addition of a couple blogs coincided with the new site, including *Centerpoints*, to present the "voice of the institution at its core," and *Walker Seen*, a public relations outlet to display the Walker's "scenes, settings, partings, and people." The other blogs are as follows: *Crosscuts* (Film/Video), *Field Guide* (Education and Community Programs), *The Gradient* ("in-house design studio"), *The Green Room* (Performing Arts), *Media Lab* (New Media Initiatives), and *Untitled (Blog)* (Contemporary Art), as well as *mnartists.blog* described above. The entire blogging enterprise was rebranded in 2012 after the launch of its new website. The rebranding also implemented a system of logos or icons. A different flag design distinguishes each of the nine blogs to strengthen its specific identity. As the Walker's New Media staff blogged, "The blogs definitely represent the long tail side of our publishing efforts – lots of small bits of specialized content for micro-niche audiences – so maintaining a strong emphasis on the personalities behind the Walker and their specific interests was key."⁵¹

By comparison, the Smithsonian Institution produces thirty-nine blogs. As the largest museum and research complex in the world, the Smithsonian Institution represents many interests

⁴⁹ Vogel, "Visitors to the Met,"

http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20060330thursday.html.

⁵⁰ Dowden, *Annual Report 2006-2007*, http://annualreport.walkerart.org/2007/WAC_AR_07.pdf. Originally quoted from page 60 in the print version.

⁵¹ Eric Price, Emmet Byrne and Paul Schmelzer, "Introducing Media Lab and the New Walker Blogs," *Media Lab* (blog). Walker Art Center Website. August 23, 2012, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2012/08/23/introducing-media-lab-and-the-new-walker-blogs/>.

over its eighteen cultural institutions in Washington D.C. and two in New York City that include an array of museums and galleries, a zoo, nine additional research centers, and other projects. While these organizations have separate websites representing their individual organizations, the Smithsonian's central website reveals aspects of its overall online strategy. Similar to the Walker, the Smithsonian homepage, si.edu, provides visitor and exhibition information, online articles, and a selection of blog posts. The si.edu home page, however, has fewer types of media and a tiered, but simpler layout. The full set of blogs are accessed by the "Connect" tab along the top menu that links to si.edu/Connect or via the large social media icons grouped near the bottom of the page. By clicking on the blogs option, the menu page for the full thirty-nine blogs appears. Moreover, the scope of the blogs emphasized the institution's collective expertise, combining careful research with personal views.

The Walker's authorial identity also affected other design issues. For "Art News From Elsewhere," the Walker staff consciously decided a link would direct web users away from the Walker's homepage to the outside site, instead of having it open in a new window. Schmelzer explained, "The rationale is that by ceding authority, we maintain authority."⁵² In other words, when the Walker's grants access to other sites, it relinquishes authority, though ultimately the museum chooses to permit this access. Moreover, he likens this conditional authority to having multiple, subjective perspectives. Reflecting on his time at the National Museum Publishing Seminar in Chicago in June 2012, Schmelzer elaborated on his ideas:

I was asked to talk about "the voice of the museum." While some in attendance were from more conservative institutions, which believe that it's imperative to maintain one unified institutional voice, we and many others think the opposite. By having a multiplicity of voices, we can better represent contemporary life... we have a more authentic — and therefore attractive, we think — voice online. Same principle [for redirecting the page to an outside source when linking]: by letting go, we gain more.⁵³

⁵² Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface"

⁵³ Schmelzer, "Beyond Interface"

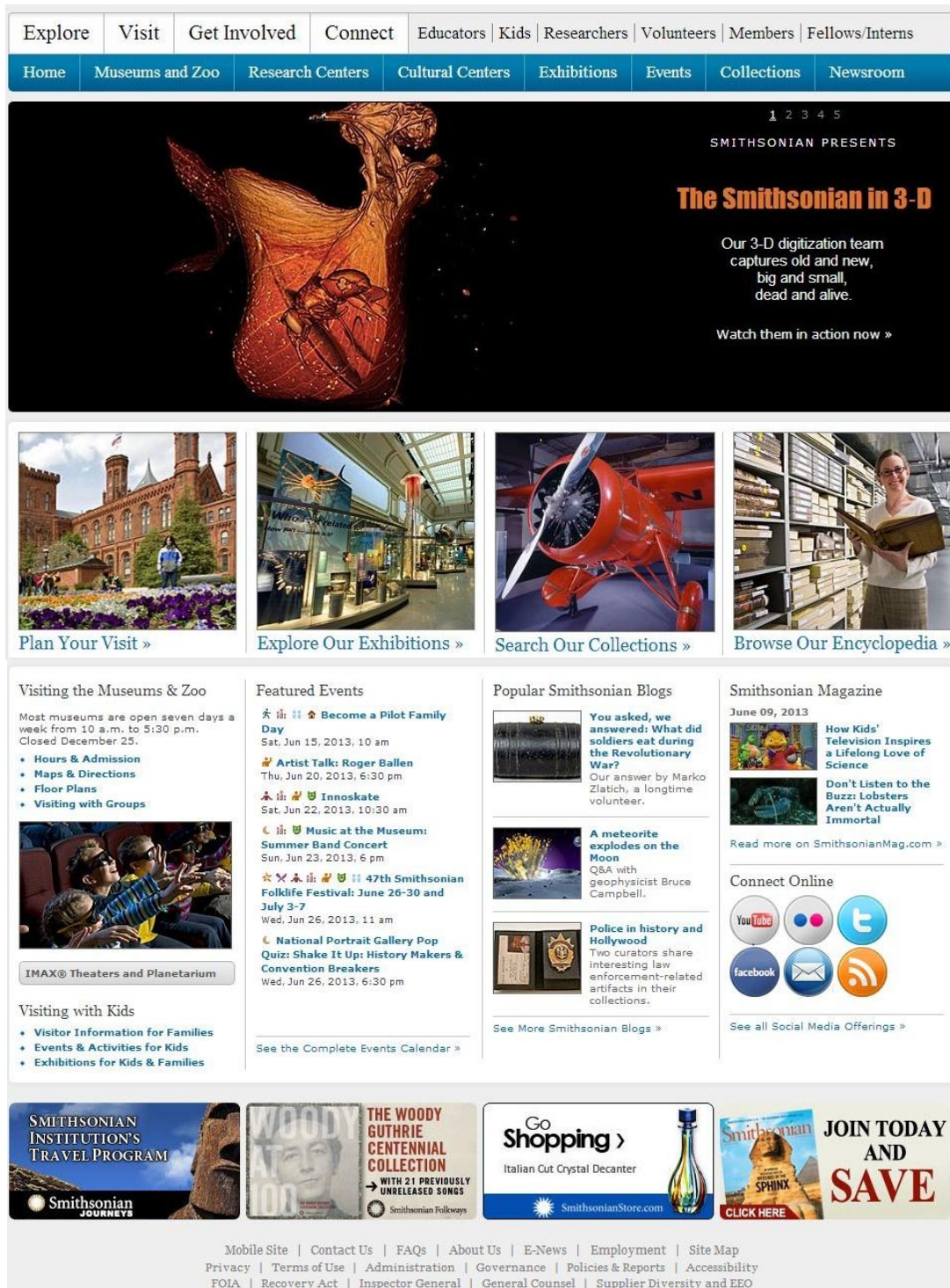


Fig. 11 The Smithsonian Institute Website, Last Modified May 30, 2013, www.si.edu.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The Smithsonian Institute Website's Terms of Use, accessed May 30, 2013, <http://www.si.edu/termsfuse>. Terms of use make explicit the Right to include this image for online, non-commercial use. In compliance to the terms, please note the citation of the image in the caption. I have likewise excluded the logo from the top of the website.

To Schmelzer, a “multiplicity of voices” apparently represents a loss of control and authority, in favor of being “more authentic.” This misidentifies how the Walker uses its authorial authority. It also undermines the primacy of the artist’s voice, as just one of many perspectives. In contemporary media, a plurality of views or voices is aggregated to represent a consolidation of audience-friendly products, not authenticity. This is the new authority of the cultural institution: its market coverage and the public’s receptiveness. As for having one or more institutional voices, the actual tension exists between the older method of mass media distribution and the newer targeting of multiple networked niche social groups, native to the Internet. A look at other media can clarify this cultural shift.

Online providers of television programming and movies similarly aggregate various items into large easy-to-navigate entertainment databases. These media companies want more than a large audience for one program, but aim to have enough variety to attract diverse audiences and to own unique or specialized content. The Internet thereby enables a large audience to consume different things from the same source, at the same time. In contrast, traditional broadcast television, like other mass communication media, must appeal to the largest mass audience to justify the large investment of having a single program occupy a complete slot of time. Yet, even television has been affected. Now, a media corporation might own several different broadcast, cable, or digital brands with an ever expanding number of channels or shows addressing niche interests.

Returning to the concept of a museum’s voice and its authority, Schmelzer’s “more conservation institutions” resemble broadcast television or mass advertising, where the distribution of a singular program or image depended on the popularity and strength of its one brand identity to gain recognition in or coverage in an entire market. The Walker, however, has

validated the rise of niche audiences and markets that accelerated with the use of social media. For comparison, consider the recent climate of political elections and the impact of the small swing voter groups. Success in elections now relies on the ability of candidates to appeal to a variety of interest groups, even those that are seemingly marginal. The goal in this fragmented social field is to appeal to all audiences, as well as a core constituency.

With the fragmentation of social groups into niche interests in mind, one can more readily see the value in the Walker's proliferation of multimedia and online content under its brand. The museum is *not* "ceding authority," to maintain it or otherwise. That is a mischaracterization. It is simply maintaining authority, full stop. Likewise, it is *not* "letting go," but asserting its ability to represent a diverse media and cultural field from multiple vantage points. Featured conveniently on its new homepage, the Walker's several blogs, its channels, and aggregated online content may look different and come from different sources of production, but they still represent the power of the institutional presence. The method is different than in previous media eras, but the aim is the same.

The Museum and Cultural Production

To attract online visitors, the Walker has readily expanded its production and management of digital objects, documentation, and other resources. The front page displays the most recent, relevant, and popular items as they are needed. For instance, the *Walker Magazine*, *Walker Channel*, *Walker Blogs*, online database of its permanent collection, and Exhibitions and Events Calendar all exist as archives on the back pages of the website. These digital objects and documents have become a regular part of its museum administration, collections and interpretation as well as production and commissions. As Viso states, "The intent of the new site is to make visible our role as a generative producer and purveyor of content and broadcast our

voice in the landscape of contemporary culture.”⁵⁵ This “content” often masks the political and cultural implications of this accelerated cultural production. Actually, content is just another word for cultural production.

Those who control the means of production, control its content. Artist Hans Haacke acknowledges this in his well-known article of 1984, “Museums, Managers of Consciousness” in which he describes museums as a “consciousness industry.” Haacke considers the economic conditions of the art world and specifies that “[t]he art world as a whole, and museums in particular, belong to... ‘the consciousness industry.’”⁵⁶ (Interestingly, the Walker includes works by Haacke in its collection.) Haacke believes the term “industry” appropriately depicts the conditions by which the “production, distribution and consumption of art” occur and he stresses the role of technocratic arts managers who “do not blush in assessing the receptivity and potential development of an audience for their product.”⁵⁷ Art and its cultural by-products are made for consumption.

To consider the context of arts production, Haacke also refers to Karl Marx’s work *German Ideology*, explaining “consciousness is a social product. It is, in fact, not our private property. . . It is contingent, an open system, responsive to the crosscurrents of the environment. It is, in fact, a battleground of conflicting interests.”⁵⁸ Likewise, the museum creates products of consciousness that tend to represent its interests, but also negotiates with other political, cultural, and social impulses. For instance, this past year, in 2012, the Walker commissioned ten different

⁵⁵ Olga Viso, “Idea Hub: Introducing the New Walker Website,” *Walker Art Center Magazine*. Walker Art Center Website, December 1, 2011, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2011/idea-hub>.

⁵⁶ Hans Haacke, “Museums, Managers of Consciousness,” in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, ed. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Ashgate, 2004), 400. Originally published in *Art in America*, 72, no. 2 (February 1984). The German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger first used the phrase “consciousness industry” in a 1962 essay “The Industrialization of the Mind. The essay was made available in English translation in Enzensberger’s book *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics, and the Media* (Seabury Press, 1974). By the early 1980s, Haacke was applying this concept to the art world.

⁵⁷ Haacke, “Museums, Managers of Consciousness,” 401.

⁵⁸ Haacke, “Museums, Managers of Consciousness,” 404-405.

artistic projects including performing arts programs that featured global and experimental work such as Young Jean Lee's *Untitled Feminist Show* for their annual "Out There" series. The museum, however, uses aesthetically daring art to build its institution's audience and to filter its impact on greater society. Contemporary art institutions often provide the support and the location for "extreme artistry" and artists depend upon this institutional support for their work to reach audiences, even as artists and art decry the power of the institution.⁵⁹ Under the logic of the Walker's new informational platform, commissions of "radical" art become neutralized as "content." The true purpose of these cultural objects and their related social information products is to become points of content in the institution's cultural network.

Additionally, the media often covers the arts as a "leisure" or entertainment activity and thereby often masks the economic, political and social implications of arts activities.⁶⁰ In a conflicting trend over the last few decades, the arts industry has very publically and politically defended its interests against those who have actively sought to strip funding from the arts. Moreover, legacy journalism provides less coverage of the arts, as its ability to maintain profits has diminished. The Walker seeks to cover this gap, but does not portend to be a neutral party.

Cultural theorists and critics Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) were important Frankfurt School philosophers and had similar thoughts about what they called "the culture industry." Surpassing the consciousness industry's use of industrial logic to administer its interest, the cultural industry also excelled in using the means of mass industrial production, as well as methods of social administration and oversight. Horkheimer and Adorno confronted the consumption of mass entertainment radio, cinema, and magazines as the

⁵⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, trans. and intro. J.M. Bernstein (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 117.

⁶⁰ Haacke, "Museums, Managers of Consciousness," 406.

production of a “unified . . . mass culture.”⁶¹ Then, as now, diversified products only offer the illusion of consumer choice. Yet, today’s production exceeds its former logic not only to celebrate the diversity of production, but to master its increasingly specialized and subjective markets.

- REPLACING THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST WITH THE VOICE OF THE MUSEUM

⁶¹ Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 104

SECTION 3: THE MUSEUM AS A HUB

Internet Protocols

To understand the impact of the Walker's model of cultural production, the website's structure within the Internet must be examined. The Internet is the native landscape of the Walker website and presents a model for a networked ecology that demonstrates the nature of Walker's online relationships. The Walker's online presence is realized in material and spatial terms that manifest inherent structures of the Internet. After considering the material conditions of the Internet, the Walker's method of territorial expansion online will become clear. In general, the Walker places itself in a center of its many radial connections that serve as spokes from its cultural and institutional "hub." While this type of network model is not new, especially online, it is interesting for a museum to engage in this sort of practice from its homepage. Essentially, the Walker is using the architecture of the Internet to map out the expanded space of the museum.

Though the vastness of the Internet often gives the false sense that being online is like roaming freely through a wild, open terrain, in reality, the Internet is managed through highly structured oversights, highly coordinated functions, and carefully executed technologically specific instructions. This management style is the very basis of networked computing and is known as computer protocols. A computer protocol consists of guidelines and rules that describe the technical standards for any aspect of computing.⁶² Simply put, protocols are the rules that govern all aspects of the Internet. While Internet protocols are abstract concepts like laws, they also are like architecture or city planning. They are built into the physical interactions and material connections of the Internet and thereby establish the construction of its networked form.

⁶² Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2004), 6.

These protocols manifest materially into different systems or mechanisms that handle two contrasting organizing impulses. One system manages the primary aspects of communication, and the other handles the mapping of Internet locations. On the one hand, this communication system allows distributed, autonomous local computers to control the transmission of data to other computers in the network; while, on the other, the system's strict hierarchies organize any computer's ability to seek and to confirm the location of other computers. Additionally, this "dialectical tension" accounts for the contradicting characteristics of the Internet.⁶³ To reiterate, an individual computer acts as autonomous agent, giving its user a sense that he or she can freely move through the Internet; however, the network maps each computer through a hierarchical system that regulates an individual's ability to access the other computers on the Internet.

Protocols also establish three key concepts essential to understanding how the Walker's website builds its network through the Internet. First, the Internet comprises real space. Though this space is not tangible and does not form fixed dimensions, the Internet is a fully mapped space. Internet space forms a strictly ordered map. Identified by a unique domain name (e.g. www.walkerart.org), each website has a specific location on the Internet, a designated "name space" with a corresponding numerical IP address.⁶⁴ The Internet must be able to locate every user's computer within it, to establish paths of communication through the collective network. Second, networked computers are programmed to be social. They connect to each other in the sending and receiving of information and thereby establish relationships through the Internet. In terms of Internet communications, this connection is the basis for confirming the spatial relationship between located parties. A communication is social, traveling data. When a computer "goes to a website," it finds the location of that website's IP address and then requests

⁶³ Galloway, *Protocol*, 8.

⁶⁴ Galloway, *Protocol*, 47-48.

and retrieves data that the website shares between it and another computer on the Internet. Likewise, clicking on a link will connect the user to another site, and thereby form an additional computer-to-computer or sender-receiver relationship. Finally, taken together, the sum of all these social connections forms a networked structure that establishes the Internet. Different networks produce different types of structural patterns or spatial models that express the nature of their relationships. Fundamentally, the Internet is spatial, social, and networked.

Furthermore, Internet protocol only classifies the data it transports as different mathematical data. The information that we read as text or images is not semantically understood by Internet protocol.⁶⁵ Humans interpret the data as something meaningful to them. As media theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker vigorously pronounce, there is no such thing as content as something separate from its “technological vehicles of representation.”⁶⁶

Data has no techniques for creating meaning, only techniques for interfacing and parsing... Meaning is data conversion. What is called ‘Web content’ is, in actual reality, the point where standard character sets rub up against the hypertext transfer protocol. There is no content; there is only data and other data... To claim otherwise is a strange sort of cultural nostalgia, a religion. Content, then, is to be understood as a relationship that exists between specific technologies. Content, if it exists, happens when this relationship is solidified, made predicable, institutionalized, and mobilized.⁶⁷

The Internet serves to establish relationships between sender and receiver, regardless of the apparent content being sent. Since the Walker proclaims that its website is content driven, it is helpful to see how all this content, its online media, is populating the data landscape with more Internet traffic, more communications, in order to form more relationships. Just as the space of the Internet is material mapped, Internet protocols create social relationships that can be structurally mapped. Accordingly, the Walker’s online structure is built on the social connections between the various web visitors and their access to the Walker’s different types of

⁶⁵ Galloway, *Protocol*, 52.

⁶⁶ Galloway and Thacker, *Exploit*, 144-145.

⁶⁷ Galloway and Thacker, *Exploit*, 145.

media products and the different stories. As the *Walker Magazine*'s managing editor, Paul Schmelzer said, "Yes, we're trying to create relationships, and the content is a way to do that. The news format is first and foremost relational."⁶⁸

To further clarify, protocols do not provide semantic meaning for the packets of data they move.⁶⁹ Protocols do not understand their electronic information as a symbol or a sign, but only convert information through mathematical logic. Protocols handle this information as if it is in a sealed package while transporting it over the Internet. It resembles mail in the hands of the postal service. It only matters that the content arrives correctly; it does not concern itself with the content inside the information packets while establishing Internet connections. Furthermore, as Galloway expresses, "Viewed as a whole, protocol is a distributed management system that allows control to exist within a heterogeneous material milieu."⁷⁰ That is, the same Internet systems apply to different types of media (from video to text) and manage them as forms of communication between different computers (from mainframes to microprocessors) by the same rules. More pointedly, the means to exert control through the network abides by the same rules and, likewise, can move through heterogeneous forms of media and computers.

Accordingly, the Walker website treats its content in a similar fashion. Though it labels the content of its website with different categories and taxonomies, the front page "stories" comprises a mix of links to a variety of media types, video links, blogs, text articles, etc. Whatever the media's content or material format, they all are managed by the same protocols that locate, organize, and control their presence and accessibility in the network. Each of these stories or links is a means to establishing network connections, no matter what the medium. Taken together, they express a model of networked relationships representing the total

⁶⁸ Schmelzer, *Beyond Interface*.

⁶⁹ Galloway, *Protocol*, 52

⁷⁰ Galloway, *Protocol*, 8.

connections between the website's various content and its multiple readers. This network structure now defines the space of the museum online.

Linking: Building Your Network

The Walker website also demonstrates that its reach extends to other institutions, as well as to varied audiences. The website's links make the Walker's relationships visible. Additionally, links affirm the agency of the linker, the Walker, in choosing its social and cultural field. The linked content and its provider are subsumed into the network of the linker; a link does not diminish the influence of the website but expands it. Links also jump between spaces and cross distances, a behavior common in contemporary societies. Since links do send website visitors away from the site, they must be used in a calculating way. As Geert Lovink points out, when they are used strategically, "links should support your argument or business. Links are 'ties' that symbolize 'reputation' (which then can be measured and mapped)" and demonstrate "positive affirmation."⁷¹ Links are associations that can be measured and mapped.⁷² On the bottom border of its website, the Walker notably lists its affiliated groups and provides links to its local network (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Walker Art Center Website, "Network," walkerart.org. Found in the border at the very bottom right hand corner of the homepage and most of the content pages.

⁷¹ Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*, 15.

⁷² Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*, 15.

This process of selection through associations was envisioned decades ago as an expression of computer technologies. While director of the United States Office of Scientific Research and Development during the 1940s, scientist Vannevar Bush imagined a machine called the Memex and, though it was never completed, it was the conceptual precursor to many of the computer technologies we use today. His ideas on future technologies and the Memex were published and popularized in 1945. He envisioned that the Memex could store, record, copy, edit, locate, and manage file documents and micro-photographs, but most significantly, it would mimic the associative powers of the human mind, in the task of selecting what was relevant from its mammoth storehouse of documents.⁷³ In fact, technologies often amplify functions that are already seen as anthropomorphic.⁷⁴ “Selection by association” would be an attempt to mechanize a function of the human mind, so that “with one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain.”⁷⁵

Moreover, to help its human user, Bush’s Memex technology would remember these selections and by forming and recording a “trail” of these associative links.⁷⁶ A single item could be linked with several trails. The Walker’s website also follows trails-of-associations, but instead of forming links that reflect the mental associations of an individual, they promote the institution. The web user’s selections are not associations made freely of one’s own accord, though it may seem so, but from a preselected field or databank of information produced by the Walker to represent its interests.

⁷³ Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” in *The New Media Reader*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 44. Originally published in *Atlantic Monthly*, 176 (1): 101-108 (July 1945) and later abridged in *Life*, 19 (11): 112-114, 116, 121, 123-124.

⁷⁴ Winner, *Whale and the Reactor*, 13.

⁷⁵ Bush, “As We May Think,” 44.

⁷⁶ Bush, “As We May Think,” 45.

Likewise, contemporary computer systems provide informational records and Internet searches based on associative analysis, and they record users' web browser histories. In a less visible way, the corporate and governmental managers of the Internet track users' computer traffic, to map visits to various websites, to which specific pages, for how long, and when. They want to discern how online users make their selections. These associative behaviors influences search engines and web analytics (the tracking and recording of web user traffic and behavior), as well as hyper-links and aggregating websites.

Museums and other arts organizations are similarly using web analytics to establish the scale of their institutional networks. Starting in July 2008, the Walker changed how it obtained its data on the users of its networked services. At that time, the Walker went from using web server log analysis to Google Analytics. Google Analytics provided the Walker with page specific data that they could not previously capture. The Walker also tracked its social media data on YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter for the first time in 2008. With these tools in place, the Walker measured over 1.78 million visits to the walkerart.org and over 2.6 million unique online visitors to the Walker and its affiliated websites, mnartists.org and ArtsConnectEd.org, in the fiscal year July 2008- June 2009. After its relaunch at the end of 2011, walkerart.org attracted its largest audience with 2.1 million visits tracked over the fiscal year July 2011 through June 2012. That same year, the Walker and its network of affiliated sites connected to a total audience of more than four million. Meanwhile, over the same four year period, from July 2008 to June 2012, its social media audience grew exponentially. The Walker's YouTube videos received over forty thousand views in 2008 – 2009 and last year they got over four hundred thousand views. The initial Twitter account had over six thousand

followers, and its current seven Twitter accounts have over three hundred thousand followers. Facebook fans went from over thirteen thousand to nearly sixty thousand.

Web links and social media likes are not just a way to assert cultural associations. They drive Internet traffic and can enhance visibility online. The web is driven by the attention economy. Even criticism serves to enhance the Walker's visibility. More links serve more traffic. The assortment of stories on the Walker's site serves to increase its search engine - rankings. The communication between the Walker website and the other linked sites also form a structural circuit in the Internet.⁷⁷ Web analytics also mine online user data that can be turn into profits by the telecommunications systems, and the increased data on audiences can be leveraged into museum funding. If audience popularity is the goal, then the website provides the materials to attract audiences who may click one of its many stories and enhance the Walker website's rankings. The rankings affect the order in which the individual pages appear in Google's search results and, hence, bolster online visibility. The success of its new online platform depends on the audiences it draws and the number of pages that they click. The website's ultimate function is not journalistic. Instead, it builds its network to enhance the Walker's cultural standing.

Graph Theory

As noted earlier, a group of related network connections constructs a spatial pattern that can be mapped. Graph theory is an established method of analyzing and modeling the different types structures – or put more simply, the different shapes – that result from these different network configurations.⁷⁸ It applies mathematical mapping to the different relationships established in a network. Everything connected in network is labeled a node. A node might be a

⁷⁷ Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause*, 17.

⁷⁸ Galloway and Thacker, *Exploit*, 31-34. Actually, the entirety of *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* reflects graph model analysis with separate sections for nodes and edges (lines). Galloway likewise describes centralize, decentralized, and distributed node diagrams without specific reference to graph theory in *Protocols*, 30-37.

person, a thing, or an object, but may also signify an online activity or event. Then, a line, or edge, delineates each related node's connections. In an Internet model, the lines may comprise communication pathways. A centralized graph (Fig. 13) results in a pattern where only one central node exists with all other nodes connected to it, like the center of a wheel. The peripheral nodes do not connect to each other, but are all routed to the center. Likewise, a decentralized graph (Fig. 14) includes multiple centralized nodes, sometimes referred to as hubs, where each hub has several peripheral nodes that primarily connect to it. Some nodes connect to more than one centralized node and are shared between multiple hubs. Like a centralized graph, however, the peripheral nodes in a decentralized graph do not connect directly to each other, but only to one of the centralized hubs.

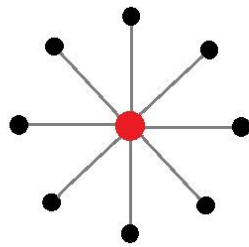


Fig. 13 Centralized Graph

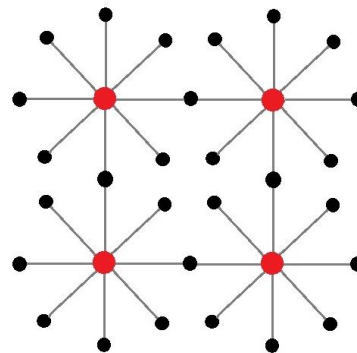


Fig. 14 Decentralized Graph

The decentralized model is the most common networked structure and applies to different forms of communication. When using a cell phone one is connected to the nearest cell tower, and likewise, all others within its radius are connected to that cell tower. As a cell moves out of the range of one tower, it is picked up by another tower within that cell company's network. Another type of decentralized pattern emerges when people from a variety of locations congregate around a few of the largest news or entertainment media outlets.

In contrast to these images, the Internet enables a distributed graph (Fig. 15), where all the nodes have equal access to each other and are connected throughout the network. This

means individuals communicate readily and directly with a variety of other individuals.

Increasingly, though, online behavior tends to follow decentralized networking patterns and where groups gather around popular media outlets and niche interests.

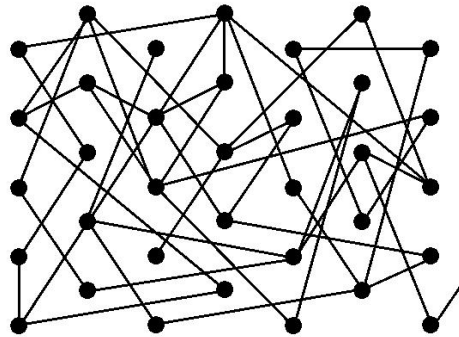


Fig. 15 Distributed Graph

Correspondingly, the Walker describes its website as a “hub,” a centralizing structure within a larger cultural network. Olga Viso announced the launch of the website with these words: “As the Walker’s name signals, we’re a center: a hub that brings together various pursuits related to contemporary art . . . I’m excited to introduce our new website, an online hub for ideas about contemporary art and culture, both inside the Walker and beyond.”⁷⁹ The rest of the Walker staff has matched that enthusiasm in touting its website as a cultural hub. For instance, Schmelzer depicted the website as “a culture hub, an entity that’s making these links (both literally and philosophically) between ideas.”⁸⁰ This image is aptly illustrated (Fig. 16) in an article by Ryan French, the Walker’s Director of Marketing and Public Relations, promoting the new website. The illustration depicts the Walker website as a large hub or node connected to smaller nodes representing its different departments and cultural offerings, including collections, exhibitions, articles, blogs, and events programming. These nodes are arranged to create a large “W” shape. Additional peripheral nodes radiate from the center and represent different artistic

⁷⁹ Viso, “Idea Hub,” <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2011/idea-hub>.

⁸⁰ Schmelzer, *Beyond Interface*.

disciplines, such as Visual Arts, Dance, and New Media. In the article, French also characterizes how the website expresses the Walker's new relationship with its audience:

Through its new website, the Walker Art Center addresses the trends of a quickly changing museum world – where audiences have increasing demands and growing power and the lines between content provider and distributor are being redefined. Increasingly, institutions are struggling with the intersection between communications, interpretation, publishing, and audience engagement in onsite and online platforms where the public itself is now claiming some authority.⁸¹

Ironically, the audiences' desire to make museums' content reflect their own personal experiences feeds this institutional network.

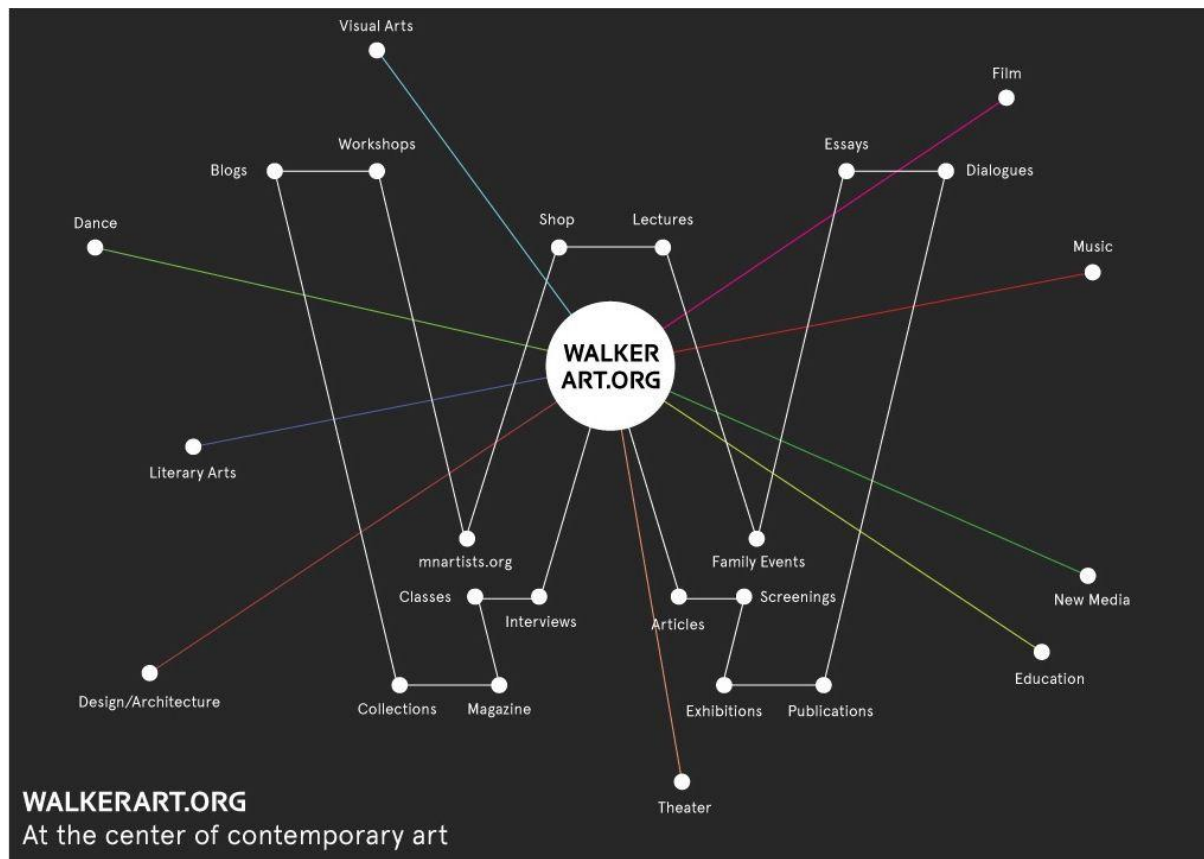


Fig. 16 Ryan French, Illustration for “Submission of Excellence: Walker Art Center,” ArtsFwd.org Website, December 5, 2012, <http://artsfwd.org/submission-of-excellence-walker-art-center/>.

⁸¹ Ryan French, “Submission of Excellence: Walker Art Center,” ArtsFwd Organization Website, December 5, 2012, <http://artsfwd.org/submission-of-excellence-walker-art-center/>. Ryan French retains image rights and credits.

Despite the distributed system of the Internet, nodes become centralized hubs when they disproportionately have more connections to other nodes, while the remaining nodes have very few connections to them. By establishing multiple connections, the network traffic favors these hub nodes. The Walker has adapted to network communications but took a form to extend its mapped institutional territories and distribute its institutional effects further through the cultural field. Yet, protocol cannot account for the political nature of its structures. It does not account for motives, only connections. Protocols exist to fulfill their own technological logic, but institutions use the Internet network and its structures for their own ends.

Institutions that establish decentralized networks typically operate to consolidate power. This phenomenon is aptly demonstrated by the new media artist Josh On in his online work *TheyRule.net* (Fig. 17) launched in 2000. *TheyRule.net* displays the connections between different corporate board members that it describes as the “ruling class.” The interactive work allows users to create and save maps of different board members, represented by person icons, and their different corporate boards, represented by table icons. A user populates a map by searching for or selecting specific companies or people. Using a database on corporate executives, each additional element is mapped based on its connections. The user can move the icons around to arrange them on the screen and the lines, representing established connections, remain connected to the icons as the user moves them.⁸² The map below (Fig. 17) depicts board members of four major banks, who are also on the boards of several other companies that are also shown. Mapping these connections forms a decentralized network. In a network organized this way, the hubs concentrate power.

⁸² I edited the existing “Big Banks” map in this way, by moving the icons to fit them into one screen shot.

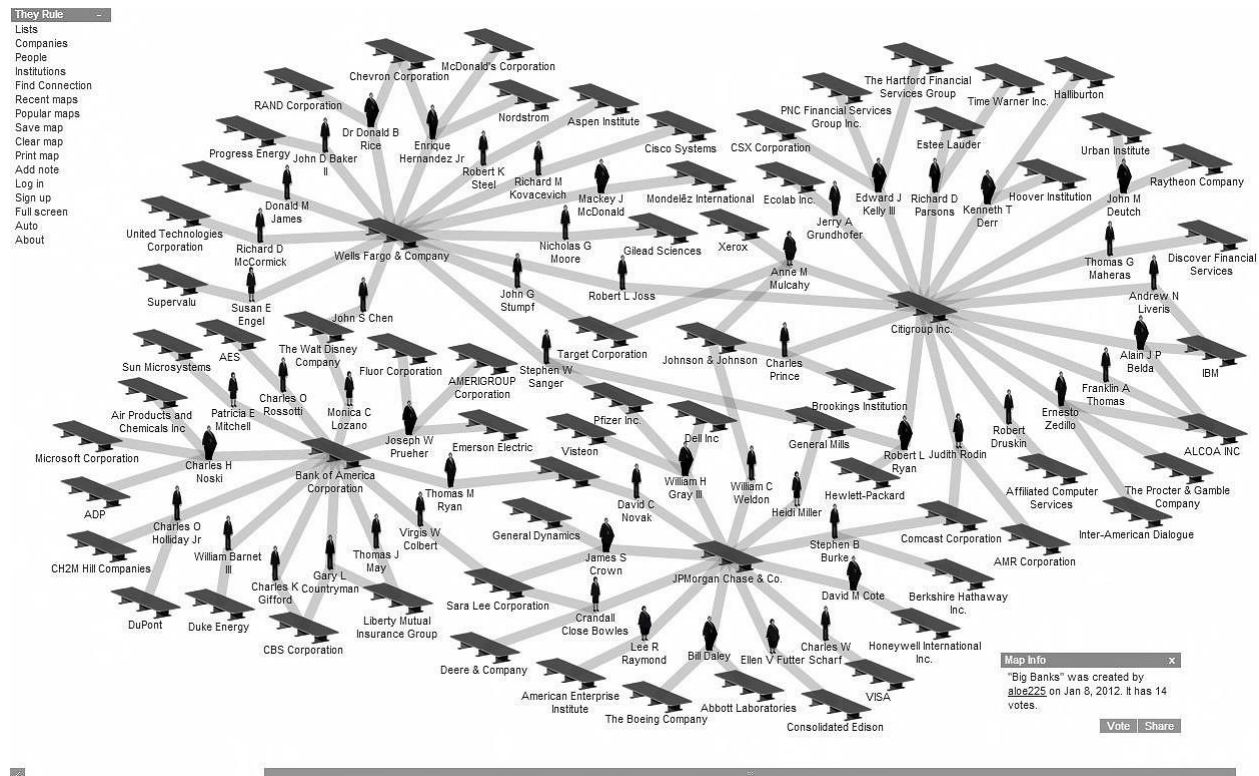


Fig. 17 Josh On, *TheyRule.net*, 2001 – present.

“Big Banks” created online by user alo225 on January 8, 2012.

Accessed and design edited by Rae Jung Wilburn on May 23, 2013.

This online map depicts the decentralized network created by boards of four major banks: Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Citigroup, and JPMorgan Chase.

The Internet began as a distributed network to prevent the consolidation of vulnerable information and to maintain multiples avenues of communication, so the distribution of important information would be protected in the case of targeted attacks. Now, the Internet is populated by networks that resemble decentralized structures. Social networking platforms, large media outlets, and Google are centralized hubs of social connectivity and dominate many aspects of Internet culture. They also give preferential treatment to their affiliates and gather a disproportionate number of connections around themselves to exert their influence. In this way, hubs serve as command centers to those around them. In reality, satellite nodes also attempt to cluster connected or affiliated nodes and, likewise, are influenced by those contacts. The ability to organize others in your network is a form of power and control. Centralized control supports

the exercise of institutional power in lieu of autonomous agents, regardless if individuals act good or bad.⁸³ On the other hand, distributed networks foster the circulation of independent cultural capital and information to support autonomous agency.

Generally, there are two social impulses that characterize Internet networking. On the one hand, each member of the Internet wants to enhance the number of connections centered on him or her. On the other, individuals want the freedom to connect with others at will, without being dissuaded by other agendas. With this in mind, the institutional impulse is to expand, especially online. Nate Solas, Walker's Senior New Media Developer, targeted this concept as "cast wider nets."⁸⁴ Notably, this idea was forwarded at the Museums and the Web 2011 conference, in the spring prior to the December launch of the Walker's new website. Since 1997, the influential Museums and the Web Conference has gathered proponents of technology who work at museums or other cultural institutions to share "best practices" and strategies for implementing technologies in arts organizations. A part of the "cast wider nets" strategy is the hope that by obtaining enough network connectivity and gaining enough visibility and cultural presence, you will be sought out by other networks. As Solas states, "Part of this [cast wider nets strategy] includes opening up our content in return so that *we* can be part of *someone else's* related content (italics in original)," and adds, this also requires that you "make it easy to understand what can be shared and how!"⁸⁵ The very nature of networked power demands that access or opportunities to connect to your website spread to other domains and networks; that other websites link to your content. Here in lies another contradiction of networked structures: they support both distributed and centralized forms of power.

⁸³ Winner, *Whale and the Reactor*, 95.

⁸⁴ Nate Solas, "Museums and the Web 2011 Recap," *Media Lab Blog* (category: conferences), Walker Art Center Website, April 11, 2011, <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2011/04/11/museums-and-the-web-2011-recap/>.

⁸⁵ Solas, "Museums and the Web 2011," <http://blogs.walkerart.org/newmedia/2011/04/11/museums-and-the-web-2011-recap/>. Italics in the original.

Speaking to the museum community at a 2001 ICOM conference, sociologist Manuel Castells recognized that museums were readily integrating informational technologies in their institutional practices. Castells believed that museums that could skillfully use technologies to present art acted as powerful physical and symbolic “cultural hybrids,” since they operated in the space between the creative individual and the telecommunications network.⁸⁶ Technologically savvy museums could negotiate the tensions in networks between practices that foster a creative global community, on the one hand, and, on the other, practices that tend to fragment society through increasingly specialized and individualized information.⁸⁷ Castells’ concern was no less the dissolution of society: “If we do not communicate, we cannot live together, and if we cannot live together, there is no more society.”⁸⁸ He hoped museums would bridge the gap between, what he labels, the “space of flows,” dominated by global centers that control the flow of global informational networks, and the “space of places” that constitute the multiple localized spaces that encourage localized identities and cultures to divorce from other locations.⁸⁹ Cultural and technology theorist Paul Virilio, likewise, identified global communication systems as a catalyst for large urban centers in a phenomenon he calls “*megalopolitan* hyperconcentration.”⁹⁰ Yet, increasingly, the divide is not only between the global and local. Even people within the same local “space of place” appear to be separating into communities with niche identities whose beliefs can be supported by the insularity of their social groups.

Castells’ proposed solution was based on new media art or technological art forms, which as hybrids of the analogue and virtual, could thereby express the individual and the Internet.⁹¹ In

⁸⁶ Castells, “Museums in the Information Era,” 427.

⁸⁷ Castells, “Museums in the Information Era,” 427.

⁸⁸ Castells, “Museums in the Information Era,” 428.

⁸⁹ Castells, “Museums in the Information Era,” 432-33.

⁹⁰ Paul Virilio, “The Third Interval,” in *The Cybercities Reader*, ed. Stephen Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 79

⁹¹ Castells, “Museums in the Information Era,” 430.

his view, new media art could resolve the isolation of the contemporary individual by connecting him or her to the social collective in the network. Thus, artists could engage and draw together audiences who were previously dislocated by the technological divide. Guided by online artistic projects, previously disparate individuals could engage each other to create a shared artistic space. The goal was to get people to leave their subjective niches and enter into a shared creative discourse, despite their differences.

The Walker website currently does not appear to support this type of artist led engagement. The website uses artists as the content, subject matter, or narrators of its online offerings. Its videos that document artists – like its “ArtSpeak” series – filter and frame the artist’s voice within its institution’s authorial production. The website turns all cultural perspectives or information into specialized “content” or cultural objects produced by staff, by the freelance videographers, or commissioned writers or artists, for whom the Walker has budgeted. Otherwise, it links to content from other media outlets. All of these products empower the museum as a cultural institution. The museum administers and manages the web as an outlet for its subjective content and its authored points of view. The website’s front page functions primarily as an institutional distribution platform, while the scant comments to the individual stories only affirm the presence of an audience.

As a networked museum, the Walker articulates, materializes, and connects with both the global space-of-flows and local spaces-of-places, as Castells envisioned. Yet, the museum subsumes artists into its content. The museum presents specialized cultural information to its audiences who consume the museum’s narratives about art or seek to affirm their own choices and perspectives. The website advances a new experience of the museum around the interests of the audience. The museum’s collection of web content, an assortment of fragmented voices, is

designed for the long-tail of Internet consumption. This content takes the shape of different forms of media but it all functions as institutional nodes.

Correspondingly, the director of the Walker, Olga Viso encourages audiences to connect with the institution and to form relationships to its cultural products. In a Walker article entitled, “Idea Hub: Introducing the New Walker Website,” Viso announced the launch of the new website, “The redesigned walkerart.org is a new creative platform for the Walker as an institution and the audiences we serve. Our questions, our passions, and our histories are present here, and they are informed by your curiosity, perspective, and knowledge. We invite your active participation, dialogue, and candid critique.”⁹² The Walker’s new site has reaped great benefits by appealing to its audiences. As a part of the Walker’s AEC division that developed the website, Ryan French announced the early returns for the new site, only six months after the launch: online visitors had increased by 40% from the previous year with a 30% increase in global audiences.⁹³ In the age of online media, the website’s networked form enables the Walker to expand the museum’s networked territory.

⁹² Viso, “Idea Hub,” <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2011/idea-hub>.

⁹³ Ryan French, “Walker Art Center,” <http://artsfwd.org/submission-of-excellence-walker-art-center/>.

SECTION 4: THE WALKER IN A SOCIETY OF CONTROL

The Museum Website as a Heterotopia

Crisscrossed by telecommunications, highways, and air travel, contemporary space is characterized by territory, communication, and speed and not by the confines of buildings.⁹⁴ As theorist Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) remarked:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.⁹⁵

In this context, information is also spatial as it crosses distances and maps meeting points in the network. At these intersections, new social spaces are formed. These spaces express the dynamics of informational societies. The Walker is such a space, as is its website.

The Walker website occupies a particular intersection, and, correspondingly, in addition to distributing information, the site compromises a museum space and social space. To understand the complexities of this space, Foucault's concept of a heterotopia provides a useful model. A heterotopia is a specialized space that mirrors society. Like a mirror, heterotopias provide a counterpoint to the social gaze. As one gazes into the mirror, one's mirrored image gazes back. Our mirrored selves occupy a "virtual space" inside the looking glass. This virtual space becomes heterotopic space when, from with the looking glass, our virtual selves look back

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 244-245, and Paul Virilio, "The Third Interval," 79. Virilio identifies the role of air travel and communication in this concept of space. Foucault identifies three characteristics of space (territory, communication and speed) with the advent of railroads. He also includes engineering works such as bridges, in contrast to architectural works.

⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, ed. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Ashgate, 2004), 371. Originally published in *Diacritics*, 16/1 (Spring 1986) 22-27, translated by Jay Miskowiec. Copyright The John Hopkins University Press.

at us and they meet the gaze of society.⁹⁶ Moreover, the heterotopic space is set apart from the regular spaces of society. From within boundaries of heterotopic space, our heterotopic selves can view the rest of society.

Foucault identified the basic traits or principles applicable to all heterotopic spaces. These traits aptly describe the Walker website. Heterotopia have specialized roles in society, but their characteristics and functions can change over time, in keeping with changes in culture and society.⁹⁷ It reflects social change itself. The museum's online network is one such change.

Heterotopia can take on the role of several places and have multiple functions; and they can also act as microcosms of larger spatial phenomenon or represent aspects of the larger world.⁹⁸ For instance, a museum and a website provide for a variety of uses of their spaces. (For example, a museum contains galleries, café, garden, aesthetic contemplation, events; and the website functions locally and globally as a news space, entertainment space, and digital collections space.) Likewise, an art exhibition is constructed of artistic fragments but is used to express the idea of an entire art movement or an artist's body of work. Moreover, in this way, the Walker website is a heterotopia of the museum itself. The Walker website is a heterotopia of the twenty-first century.

Additionally, heterotopias are exclusive spaces with permeable access. They operate as territories to which access must be granted.⁹⁹ These spaces may be occupied by or identified with a distinct social group or function, for example, governmental buildings, schools, or hospitals. There are certain public spaces that are heterotopia, but that portend illusion of openness. They may screen those who enter it. Many websites work this way by requiring

⁹⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 374.

⁹⁷ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 375.

⁹⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 376.

⁹⁹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 378.

passwords, log-ins, and membership. Other websites do this more discretely, without log-ins, but by controlling all aspects of content, by their exclusion of that which they see as undesirable, restricted, or irrelevant. They create an online sanctuary for specialized interests that demand the web user's complicity in crossing its threshold. Users gain access to most websites they want to find through search engines – the most dominant of which is Google. Either Google provides the user with a link to the web address, the user already knows it, or another site provides it. Moreover, Google tabulates search results based on its preference for affiliated sites and on user popularity rankings (measured in hits, searches, and links). The chances of stumbling across a desired site by randomly punching in letters to form the correct domain name are slim indeed. In turn, access to a site requires cultural knowledge and a locatable Internet address.

Accordingly, everyone can potentially enter the museum or its website, though cultural and physical thresholds must also be crossed. Crossing that threshold, however, is an act of exclusion from other social spaces. People enter into a space organized and controlled by the museum's specialized functions. The art historian Carol Duncan, similarly, describes the museum as a liminal place for ritualized aesthetic experiences.¹⁰⁰ The museum carefully constructs exhibition spaces that manage the audience's encounter with art work. Likewise, the museum's online space is not a void. It is site comprising the Walker's institutional strategies and connections.¹⁰¹ Occupied by a flow of stories and media objects, the website's purpose is to maintain public interest in and knowledge of the Walker's arts programs. The site acts as a moment of organized contact between the human and the site's informational flow. In this way, as Foucault states, "space takes for us the form of relations among sites."¹⁰² For the museum, the

¹⁰⁰ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 110.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 373.

¹⁰² Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 372. In this instance, "sites" reference to any place, not specifically digital, where people gather and their behavior can be quantified.

online space also quantifies humans into statistical data measuring those who enter the site. Similar to the museum's curatorial functions with the galleries, it uses this data on its online visitors to create, organize, store, classify, and circulate information in that space.

Museums and Society in the Web

For critic Michel Foucault, buildings confine those within its walls. This kind of enclosure helps to manage and control the individuals within its spaces. Moreover, Foucault's theoretical oeuvre analyzes space as an expression of power. Power over individuals in enclosed spaces corresponds to the ability to make each of them visible and thereby subject to the disciplinary powers within that space. In this way, the individual cannot hide from the powers that subjugate them, nor can the individual retreat into a generalized public, mass. Foucault attributed this type of power within enclosed spaces to the "disciplinary societies" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Disciplinary societies also succeeded the "societies of sovereignty" in which the populous supported a sovereign ruler to protect the state. In sovereign rule, power resided in an aristocratic individual who governed a unified body politic, the concept of society as a singular, undifferentiated mass that represented the rule of its counterpart, the singular sovereign. Disciplinary societies shifted to a social order compromised as a collection of differentiated individuals.

In contrast to the museum building, the museum website appears to be completely open space. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995) posited that contemporary societies implement a different way to maintain rule and order, thus, displace the older disciplinary societies. He called them "societies of control." Control societies reflect the mobility of individuals in contemporary space. In contrast to the fixed boundaries of buildings, contemporary spaces and social gatherings form in modulating dimensions. These new controls are flexible to this social

“modulation,” even in spaces that are flexible and apparently open like the Internet.¹⁰³ Different social and informational networks gather, disperse, and reconfigure themselves regularly. A website actually aggregates an array of different material and changes with the constant flow of new content. The online materials reflect changing affiliations accordingly. Moreover, the website’s audience is an ever varying social network configured through these information nodes. This apparent ease of movement in the terrain of contemporary space is what control societies address.

Furthermore, Deleuze’s contemporary control societies, like Foucault’s disciplinary societies, also use the visibility of individuals to manage their presence in the flexible networks of the Internet. Control societies control individuals through enforcing coded behaviors and incentives, and by managing the access to information, represented by passwords.¹⁰⁴ Such controls regulate entry into particular social spheres. In this way, the systems of control affect not only how we gather, but the way we conduct ourselves and how we relate to others.¹⁰⁵ In control societies, we must keep up with the latest information, skills, and training. The social utility of information depends ever more on staying current. This is how control societies manage interests in the expanse of contemporary spaces. By contrast, the enclosures of the disciplinary society suit a method of education where individuals learn a particular canon of knowledge within school and graduate with a degree; fittingly, a canon represents a completed body of knowledge, a closed informational space. While the legacy of the disciplinary society remains, people also attend an ever larger series of conferences and professional seminars, for what Deleuze deems “perpetual training.”¹⁰⁶ Such gatherings temporarily assemble individuals

¹⁰³ Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October*, Vol. 59 (Winter 1992), 4.

¹⁰⁴ Deleuze, “Societies of Control,” 5.

¹⁰⁵ Deleuze, “Societies of Control,” 6.

¹⁰⁶ Deleuze, “Societies of Control,” 5.

eager to gain access to larger social networks and specialized information. The modulation of informational societies and their markets are driven by the latest trends, as are websites like the Walker's. The Walker updates its website to reflect the latest arts events at the museum and elsewhere and the corresponding information to support its importance.

Deleuze also matches different types of machines to the different societies that used them. In his words, this occurs "not [because] machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them . . . the recent disciplinary societies equipped themselves with machines involving energy . . . the societies of control operate . . . computers."¹⁰⁷ This technological evolution also reflects "a mutation of capitalism."¹⁰⁸ Appropriate to the spaces of enclosures, nineteenth-century style capitalism was represented by the containment of production and the concentration of property, still evident today. Yet, control style capitalism depends on conquering markets through specialization as well as "colonization."¹⁰⁹ This is the nature of capitalist controls in the Internet. Similarly, technology theorist Langdon Winner explains, "Very often, of course, the centers of control that we see today arose by crushing or absorbing their competitors."¹¹⁰ As our current markets demonstrate, capital is also achieved through market fluctuations based on mathematical abstractions – quantified data – without relying on the production of physical goods. Control capital "wants to sell its services and what it wants to buy is stocks . . . Thus it is essentially dispersive, and the factory has given way to the corporation."¹¹¹ The flow of users is quantified through web analytics data and this substantiates the website's claims to its shares of the attention economy.

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze, "Societies of Control," 6.

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze, "Societies of Control," 6.

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze, "Societies of Control," 6, and .

¹¹⁰ Winner, *Whale and the Reactor*, 92.

¹¹¹ Deleuze, "Societies of Control," 6.

Museums have followed a similar trajectory. Museums originated as storehouses of wealth and privilege. They too have sovereign roots, as princely collections, before transforming into the public collections of the late eighteenth century, such as the Louvre in Paris. Modern public museums were suited to their grand monumental buildings in which they attempted to contain and order their vast collections and the knowledge they represented. Writing in early part of the twentieth century, French intellectual Georges Bataille (1897-1962) exclaimed, “Not only does the ensemble of the world’s museums now represent a colossal piling-up of wealth, but the totality of museum visitors throughout the world surely offers the very grandiose spectacle of humanity . . . devoted to contemplation.”¹¹² In museums, not only is wealth contained but so is society. In keeping with the order of disciplinary societies, visitors represent a collection of individuals (notably plural), but their “totality” represents “humanity,” the social order as a mass. Their purpose was “contemplation.” They entered the enclosure of museums to enter the collected mass of the enlightened society. Indeed, as Bataille said, “We must realize that the halls and art objects are but the container, whose content is formed by the visitors. It is the content that distinguishes a museum from a private collection.”¹¹³ Within the enclosure of the museum, the visitors of the disciplinary society form the content, the meaning, of an enlightened public. Whereas the private collection refers to the rule of the sovereign society, the public in the control society act as individuals linked or woven into in the institutional network. Control no longer requires the enclosure of people in physical spaces, but functions through the monitoring and management of social connectivity. This type of control will become more apparent in the examinations of the Walker’s social media projects to come.

¹¹² George Bataille, “Museum,” trans. Annette Michelson (1930). *October* 36 (Spring 1986), 24.

¹¹³ Bataille, “Museum,” 24.

In this way, the visitor is identified by his or her connection to the museum's objects, its informational nodes. In the case of networked information, visitors create new connections and links when they communicate with or access the museum website: they build networked connections to museum nodes. The objective is the affirmation of sociability, not the public store of knowledge. As discussed in the protocols of networks, each computer connection establishes a relationship between two different nodes, and therefore, each website visitors clicking on each news story or video forms a new contact in the museum's online network. The content is not the substance of the information – the article, story, or video. The content or purpose is, instead, the act of entering into the network, of the connection itself. Just as the museum building requires the crossing of a threshold, the web visitor who commits her-or-himself to the consumption of that information is joined to it in the structure of the network. These networked links connect the web visitor to the body of clustered information and their social bodies are the new mapped territories of the networked museum.

As the writer Kenneth Hudson stated in his 2004 address to ICOM, “one can assert with confidence that the most fundamental change that has affected museums during the half-century since ICOM was set up is the now almost universal conviction that they exist in order to serve the public. The old-style museum felt itself to be under no such obligation.”¹¹⁴ To attend to the public's interests, many museums changed. Museums' began incorporating the public's cultural memories and personal experiences into their programs and narratives. They filled their gallery spaces with a public eager to affirm their own stories and opinions as the new objective of the museum experience.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Hudson, “The Museum Refuses to Stand Still,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 85. Originally published in *Museum International*, UNESCO, 50:1 (1998), pp. 43-50.

Writing decades ago, Bataille also aptly described how the museum became a place for public edification. As he observed, “the attitude of enthusiasm and of deep communion with objects characterizes the modern museum visitor. The museum is the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself, from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in art journalism.”¹¹⁵ Likewise, blogging as arts journalism continues to affirm the subjectivity of the cultured individual. The public is made visible to itself and reflects only on itself and its subjective opinions.

Social Media: It’s All About You

In the case of networks and the modulating groups of social bodies within the societies of control, the institutional use of social media has evolved into a method to corral the public’s enthusiasm for social connectivity and self broadcasting. There is a special reciprocal correlation between the number of online visitors and the dimensions of the museum’s online network: the inclusion of more and more visitors enlarges the body of the museum. In fact, these connections mirror the space of the heterotopic museum. Individual choice has been incorporated into the body of the institution.

As with blogs, social media in all its forms encourages subjective cultural production. Subjectivity celebrates the individual instead of the institution, but in the case of social media, subjectivity supports the institutional network, not individual autonomy. The Walker’s use of social media also demonstrates this. Back in 2007, the Walker’s Robin Dowden remarked on the significance of *Time* magazine’s issue that pronounced that the 2006 “Person of the Year” was “You” – the online individual of the Information Age – and she acknowledged that the rising online culture, commonly referred to as “Web 2.0,” favors social networking. Since then, social media has greatly impacted the museum’s strategies for and views on “audience engagement.”

¹¹⁵ Bataille, “Museum,” 24.

As Ryan French, the Walker's director of marketing, also stated, "The public has a voice in the site's content, whether it is responding to articles and blogs with its own commentary, or sharing the Walker's posts across embedded social media platforms."¹¹⁶ This type of social media sharing essentially promotes the museum. Also, though generally sparse on the museum's website, comments have been successfully solicited by its social media platforms. Social media focuses on simple forms of communication and reductive responses that have replaced public discourse with popularity contests and, as Geert Lovink points out, "increasingly constitute the everyday interactions of the online billions."¹¹⁷ In its social media projects, opinions are turned into simple affirmations or "likes." Opinions are essentially customer feedback. These opinions do not empower social action among the public. The "like," sharing, or "friending" mechanisms common to social media build content, but not dialogue. Commenting seems no more than public display, though common wisdom believes social media builds communal spaces that allow for people to freely gather. Social media does not exist freely in space, however, but rather, it tethers those within it to those who monitor the network.

Since 2008, when the Walker started to capture its social media statistics, its New Media Initiatives have used various projects to increase social media audiences. The Walker created online audience voting and user generated content projects. These included the highly popular "The Cat Video Festival" of 2012 with over ten thousand online nominations of Internet video clips of cats. Cat videos are currently a cultural phenomenon, a niche market that has gained broad appeal. Through the Walker's YouTube channel, the Walker featured its selection of cat videos, organized into various film categories, such as Drama and Comedy, and then tallied online and votes. Walker presented the results online and through its media partner for the

¹¹⁶ Ryan French, "Walker Art Center," <http://artsfwd.org/submission-of-excellence-walker-art-center/>.

¹¹⁷ Lovink, *Networks without a Cause*, 51.

project, the Animal Planet that broadcasted the winner of the “People’s Choice Award, the Golden Kitty” on cable television as well as the rest of the results online. (Animal Planet is a television network affiliated with the Discovery Channel and one of the twenty-eight specialized network channels owned by Discovery Communications, Inc.) As a part of the Walker’s *Open Field* programming, the project culminated in the public display of the highest rated videos at the Walker campus as an outdoor film festival on August 30, 2012, to a live audience of over ten thousand. The event was also thoroughly merchandized with various t-shirts available for sale online through the *Walker Shop*. The festival went on tour, airing the videos for live audiences around the country, and has spawned other cat video festivals at other cultural organization. Twitter was also used as another voting avenue and to spread interest and capture audience feedback, before and after the festival. Facebook was, likewise, used. The Cat Video Festival also generated the most popular Walker blog posts in 2012. Throughout these activities, the Walker’s website reported on various aspects of the project on its homepage (Fig. 18).

The Cat Video Festival addressed a museum audience outside of the museum’s building, not confined by an enclosed physical structure, but organized it into a specialized social group in Walker’s outdoor and online heterotopic spaces. It relied on social online mechanisms instead of galleries to gather, maintain, and manage its audience. Twitter and Facebook require membership and log-in passwords, while all the visitors to Walker’s online spaces were being tracked through Google Analytics. The outdoor event was the notable call to action in the physical world, onto the campus surrounding the building. Its “open field” is a heterotopic space with permeable borders. In this space, the festival goes embodied the existing online audience, but did not create it. The objective for this museum audience has also shifted from a public, as Bataille described, celebrating its own enlightened contemplation of objects within the museum

building, to an audience celebrating its own forms of user-generated entertainment that the museum mined through its network apparatus. The Walker's production of cultural activities depends on the user-created videos, treating them like it does its collection. The audience may enjoy themselves, but the museum receives the monetary rewards for the publically created videos and the audience's participation. The Walker has already been working on the second iteration of the festival, scheduled for August 28, 2013.

Fig. 18 “The Nine Lives of the Internet Cat Video Festival,” (In “Top Stories”), Walker Art Center Website. April 1, 2013. walkerart.org.

If, as ICOM states, a museum is an “institution in the service of society” then one must consider if the institution’s use of its network aids this endeavor or impedes it.¹¹⁸ In the case of

¹¹⁸ “Museum Definition,” ICOM Website, accessed March 11, 2013, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>.

social media, it is not the subject matter, nor is it even the reductive forms of participation, that are fundamentally at issue. Rather, the centralizing tendencies of institutional structures in the network support new forms of cultural and social influence. When it comes to understanding the role of individuals in these technological systems, as Paul Virilio states, “Service or servitude, that is the question.”¹¹⁹

Disciplinary societies may be suited to social gatherings in museum buildings, but control societies oversee their website counterparts. Yet, instead of governmental rule, museums function as cultural administrators with the logic not of only of bureaucracies, but with the drive towards cultural production. Additionally, the same administrative force manages the audiences for the museum building and the new website. As computer theorist and academic McKenzie Wark stated in his “Hacker Manifesto” of 2004:

Information, once it becomes a form of property, develops beyond a mere support for capital – it becomes the basis of a form of accumulation in its own right... [Moreover] A stock of information is an archive, a body of information maintained through time that has enduring value. A flow of information is the capacity to extract information of temporary value out of events and to distribute it widely and quickly.¹²⁰

Online culture and social media have made these archival and flow structures apparent. Lev Manovich, a theorist and professor well known in the field of new media, has also noted only a very small percentage of people using social media sites actually produce or contribute any content.¹²¹ Most users of social media remain consumers. Using social media, the Walker has been able to use this information as property to expand its audience, the consumers of its cultural services. The Walker’s use of its website joined with its social media programs demonstrates administrative practices where it manages both its web content and online audience as its cultural

¹¹⁹ Virilio, “The Third Interval,” 80.

¹²⁰ McKenzie Wark, “A Hacker Manifesto [version 4.0],” ed. Joanne Richardson, Subsol online, accessed September 17, 2012, http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/warktext.html. Originally published as a book: *A Hacker Manifesto*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

¹²¹ Manovich, “Everyday (Media) Life,” 320.

production. The management of this data is central to the Walker's strategies for increased cultural influence and for expanded powers in our networked society.

CONCLUSION

The Walker Art Center is an institution that takes a physical as well as an online form. In both cases, the institution's functions are fundamentally tied and connected to the Walker's larger operations, collections, and programs. Its growing online presence relies on the Internet's sociability and the Walker's willingness to respond to increasingly subjective, niche markets. The Walker's website also aggregates content that make visible its associations and interests in the wider art world. Like many Web structures, the enticements of its online format and abundant media offerings mask the nature of its aggregated and networked power. The drive to be audience oriented actually enhances the Walker's ability to expand its cultural production. It has entered the expanded and distributed cultural territories of the web in the effort to pull the expanse of the cultural field and its audiences around its networked hub.

Through the logic of Internet protocols and the links built through its online offerings and associations, the Walker's networked structure draws strength from its ability to map and to incorporate the audience into its institutional structure. This consolidation of power also subsumes art and diminishes connections between individuals outside of its network. The Walker's networked space provides it with a new model of institutional power over the cultural field and what constitutes as its public body. The Walker has entered the societies of control. This allows for the apparent free movement of users through their own selection of Walker's online content. The networked systems, however, gather data on its users. Networks exist through its users. Therefore, online audiences are embedded in the mapped structure of the network. Each point of contact is expanding the network. By mapping and guiding the actual presence and interests of those in its network, the Walker has gone from managing cultural objects, to a monitoring and mining its audience.

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APPENDIX: LETTER OF PERMISSION

Reproduction Rights for Images from the Walker Art Center Website Via Email Correspondence

On Fri, Apr 5, 2013 at 12:07 PM, Smith, Loren <loren.smith@walkerart.org> wrote:

> Hi Rae Jung,

>

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>

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> You may use the screengrabs from our site for your paper, however I will need to get back to you on the ability for your paper to be placed online via Louisiana State University as our terms of use explicitly[sic] state that "republication" is not permitted.

>

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> Assistant Registrar

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Smith, Loren <loren.smith@walkerart.org>

Apr 5

Hi Rae,

Thank you for clarifying. We are fine with your proposal on all counts provided that you furnish us with a copy of your thesis. Clearly, we're interested to see what is being said about our redesign. Do these terms sound okay to you?

Best, Loren

VITA

Rae Jung Wilburn was born in 1978 in South Korea, just outside of its capital Seoul. She moved to the United States of American when she was four years old and was later naturalized. In 1996 she began her university studies in the United Kingdom at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. She completed a four-year honors program and, in 2000, she graduated with an undergraduate British Master of Arts degree in Honors Art History. She then spent several years working for various arts organizations and businesses in New York, Washington, DC, and New Orleans. While living in New Orleans, Louisiana, she attended Louisiana State University from 2011 to 2013 to do graduate work in Art History, for which she will receive a Master of Arts degree. Starting in the fall of 2013, she will continue her graduate studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, towards a PhD in Art History.